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# ASSAILED BY THE *Cyclone*



## Responding to Third World disasters



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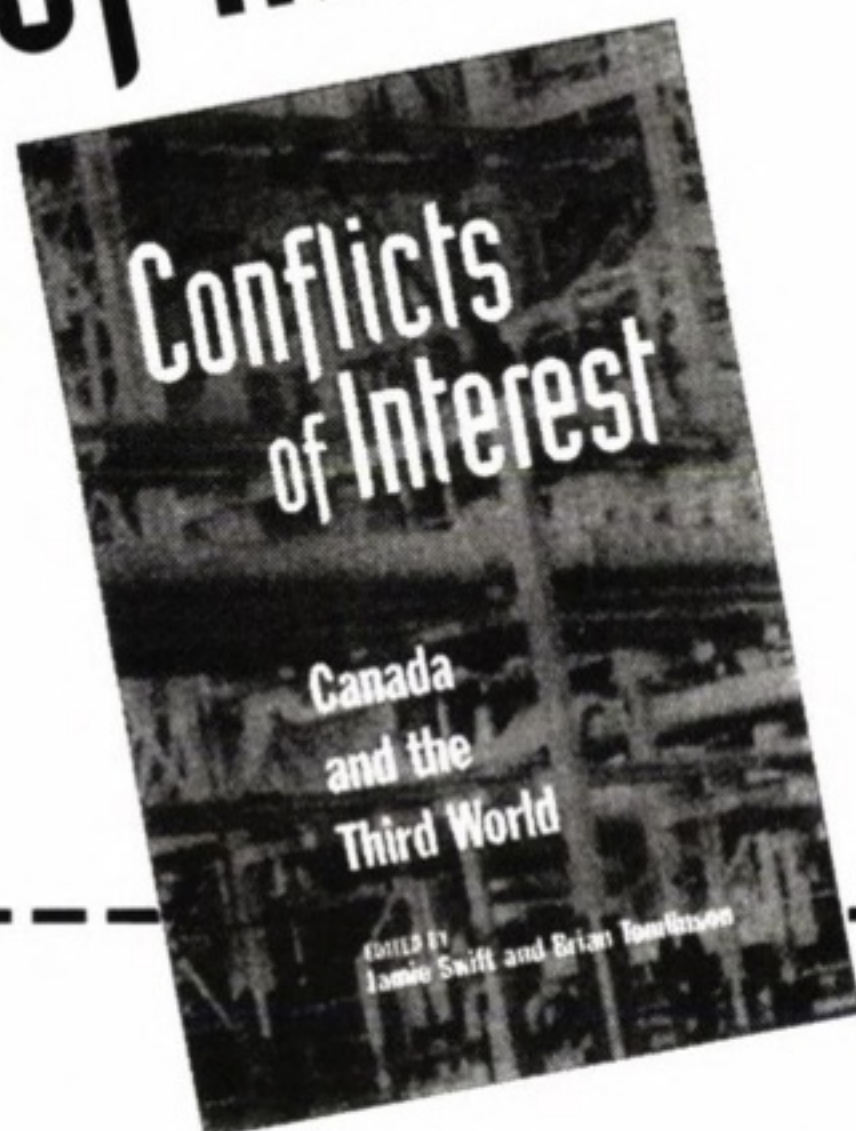
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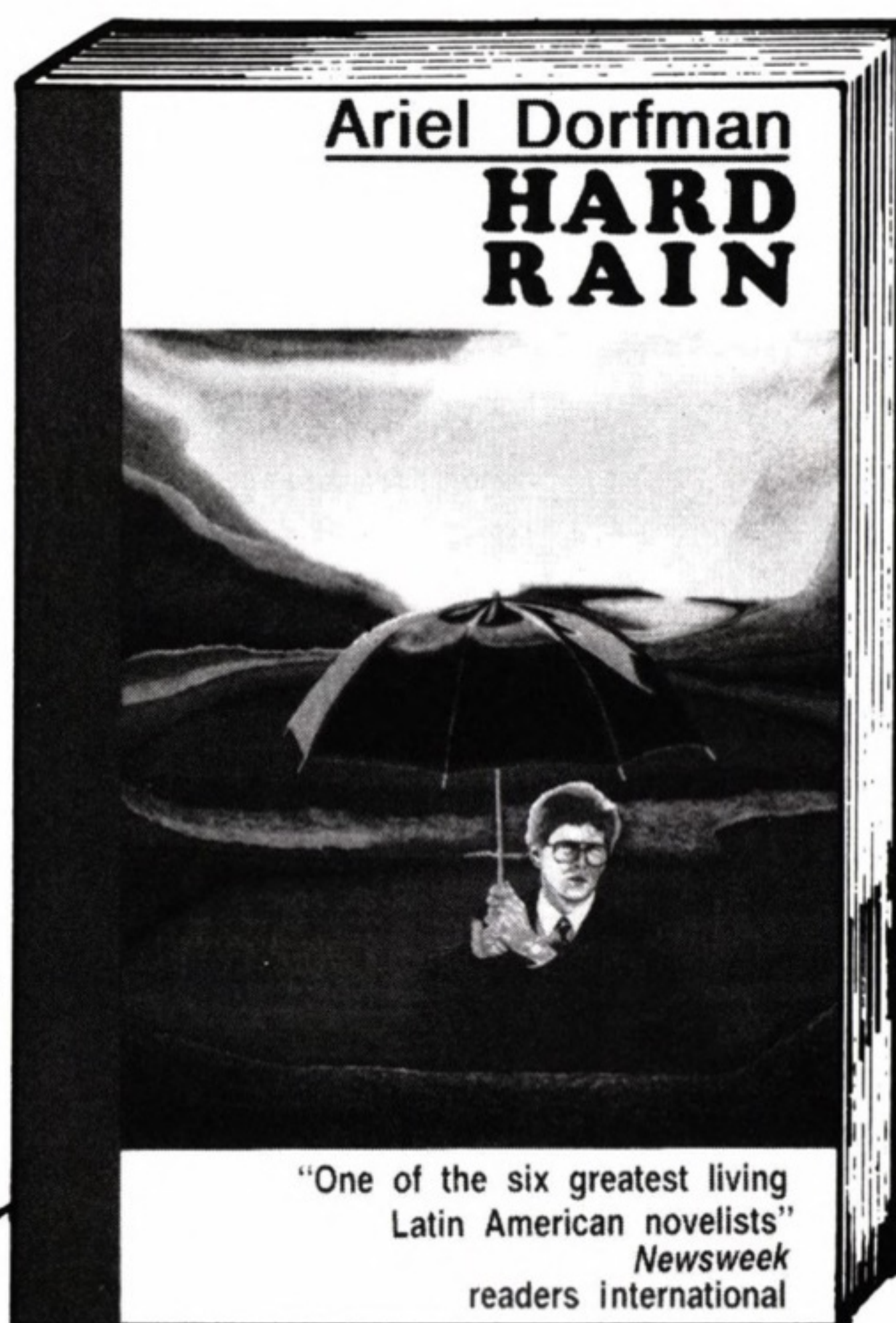
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NINT 31





**W**E'VE mentioned in this space before that the **NI** does not attempt to be a news magazine. This is fortunate since we would pretty soon be out of business if we tried to be one – how could a small, independent organization like ours compete with the vast resources and instant access of the TV news networks or the quality press?

We see our job as a different one: filling in the gaps in the news, setting it in a context that includes the Third World and generally asking questions that news journalists are not encouraged or able to ask. Often that allows us to depart completely from anything resembling a news agenda: to offer, for example, a travelogue in Vietnam or a delve into the secrets of biotechnology at a time when the rest of the world was concentrating exclusively on the Gulf War.

But there are times when we too have to tear up our own rules and respond to the

news – and this issue is an attempt to do that. I had spent a good while researching another subject entirely when the succession of disasters in the Third World became too much for me. Hearing about the desperate plight of the Bangladeshis and the Ethiopians was bad enough – but hearing people start to talk about 'compassion fatigue' as their main response was even worse. I suddenly realized not only that the **NI** had a job to do – exploring why such disasters happen and what can be done about them – but also that there was still just about time for me to abandon my other project and do it myself.

Little did I realize when I got caught in a typhoon in Vietnam last year and wrote about the people affected by it that I would be returning to the subject so soon. But researching this issue has at least helped me resolve one question that arose in my mind as the wind whipped up the waters in Hué: what's the difference between a typhoon, a cyclone and a hurricane?

There are some technical differences but they are broadly the same kind of violent storm rotating around a low pressure centre ('the eye'). The main distinction is usually one of geographical location: hurricanes are generally in the Americas, par-

ticularly the Caribbean, where Spanish colonizers adapted a word from the now-extinct Taino Indian language, *huracán*; cyclones can happen anywhere but you will hear the word cropping up most in relation to storms in the Indian Ocean; and typhoon is simply the word for a cyclone in the China seas – the Chinese for 'big wind' is *tai fung*, though the Greek *tuphon* ('whirlwind') probably contributed too.

No time for such technicalities in what follows. As longer-serving **NI** readers go through these pages they might summon up just a smidgeon of nostalgia, since this is the last issue to appear in this design: next month we unveil a whole new look which we are confident will make the magazine (even?) more of a pleasure to read.

*Chris Brazier*

**Chris Brazier**  
for the New Internationalist Co-operative

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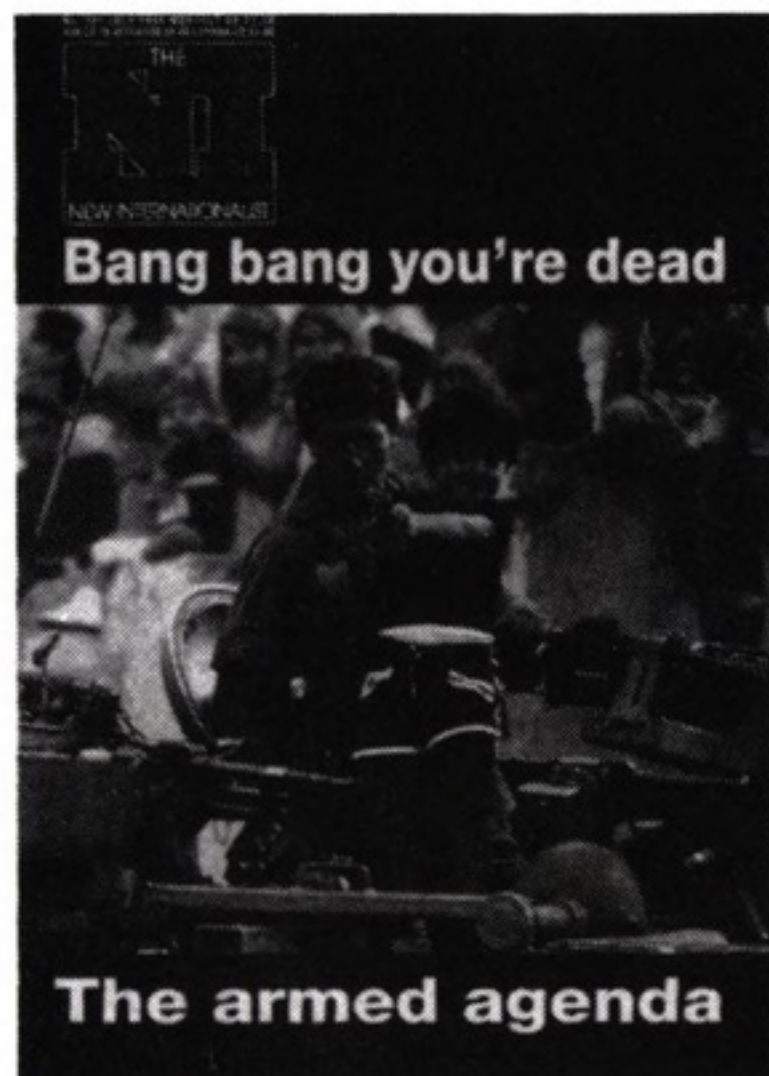
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Cover photo: Taken on Kutubia Island, one of those worst affected by the recent cyclone in Bangladesh, by Pablo Bartholomew of the Gamma agency.



## Women's work

Your issue *Bang bang you're dead* (NI 221) was right to make the point that we can all do something to tackle the arms trade. There is no better evidence of this than the efforts of the women at



Greenham Common who by their own actions inspired many thousands of people with the courage to actively protest against the nuclear threat. Through a disciplined and highly innovative campaign of non-violent direct action they succeeded in using the media in a sustained way to raise public awareness, as few other protest groups have ever done. They, perhaps more than any other group in the West this century, showed what it is possible for ordinary people to achieve when they apply their intelligence, humour and initiative to the task of achieving change.

Mary Whiteman  
Croydon, UK

## Greenham's grief

This September 5th, 1991, marks ten years of non-stop women's resistance to militarism outside the main gates of RAF/USAF Greenham Common. Many will be surprised that we are still here; the British state met the camps' persistent, non-violent, non-aligned challenge to the military with strict censorship and police violence. And on August 5th, 1989 a young Welsh woman living and working at the base was killed by a West Midlands police horse-box. Helen's

**NI** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

mother, dissatisfied with the cursory inquest into her daughter's death, fought bravely to get to the truth of what happened. But recently a Judicial Review turned down her application for a re-opening of the inquest to examine more thoroughly the conflicting evidence which had been presented.

The camp has endured much censorship, harassment and violence over the past 10 years but the killing of Helen Thomas was the most tragic. Nevertheless we continue our campaign and readers can obtain details of forthcoming events by sending a SAE to Yellow Gate, Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, nr Newbury, Berkshire, UK RG14 7AS.

All Yellow Gate Women,  
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## Taxing for death

Your fascinating issue *Taxed to death* (NI 220) skipped over the fact that a proportion of tax revenue goes towards military spending – a form of military conscription in financial terms – with at present no form of conscientious objection possible. This violates a basic right to freedom of conscience – the right not to participate in war when you have a conscientious objection against doing so. It is, for example, one of many ironies of the Gulf War that

all those in Britain who campaigned against military action had also paid, through their taxes, for the weaponry which allowed that military action to take place.

There are many groups around the world that are pressing for a way of diverting their taxes to non-military purposes and in the UK we are campaigning for a change in the law to allow conscientious objectors to have the military portion of their taxes – around 11 per cent – diverted to peace-building purposes. For more information write to 'Conscience – The Peace Tax Campaign, 1a Hollybush Place, London, E2 9QX'.

Lorna Richardson  
Conscience – The Peace Tax  
Campaign, London, UK

## Money blindness

Full marks again for digging up those relevant facts and figures on a topical issue (*Taxed to death* NI 220). However as usual the conclusions and recommendations fall short of the mark. The influential and powerful have always found a way around reformist policies however radical. And this applies to tax reforms just as anything else. When it comes down to it, the methods of taxation are not the problem, but money, an instrument of exploitation that has been so drummed into our psyche that even so-called socialists find it difficult to imagine a system

without it. You cannot seriously believe tax reforms will alter the injustices perpetuated by the capitalist system. After all NI frequently advertizes a T-shirt proclaiming that we cannot eat money, so when will you stop toying with the idea and explain this to your readers.

Neil Smith  
Stockport, UK

## Default decision

I would like to correct the piece *Democracy: multi-party time* (Updates NI 219). The author says 'Zimbabwe's President Mugabe ... has grudgingly introduced pluralism...' But we have so far had three general elections at which opposition parties fielded candidates, and since Independence we have not had a Parliament with 100 per cent members from a single party.

What has happened is that the ruling party continues to capitalize on the absence of 'quality' opposition and also on the mass rural vote. Over the years, Mugabe and some of his party colleagues have tried to present this as proof of overwhelming support for a one-party state. However others have pointed out that this would be a phony mandate because the rural masses, being largely 'uneducated', do not fully grasp the concepts of multi-party democracy. Even some intellectuals in Mugabe's cabinet have conceded this. Mugabe has not 'introduced pluralism' but merely backed down on his determination to make Zimbabwe a one-party state.

Donatus Bonde  
Gweru, Zimbabwe

## Business as usual

I enjoyed Chris Brazier's piece on Vietnam (*After the storm* NI 216). But like most Vietnam travelogues it gives the false impression that Vietnam is an isolated country where few foreigners dare go – the 'exotic syndrome'. The reality is that for years foreign business people have quietly made thousands of visits and today hundreds of them even live in Vietnam. For them Vietnam is just another (yawn) place to do





business in Asia. They study the local methods of commerce and adjust accordingly. They have experiences worth recording because they *must* understand the country to achieve success. Journalists face no such requirement.

George Maeda  
Hô Chí Minh City, Vietnam

## Fur trap

The only reference to trapping animals in your issue on Animal Rights (NI 215) was the statement that 'only one per cent of North American animals trapped for their fur are hunted by native people whose livelihood depends on hunting'. I have no idea whether that is true. But I do know that 70 per cent of trappers where I live are aboriginal and they believe the anti-fur lobby is literally threatening the survival of

their children. I just heard a native woman from the Northwest Territories attribute the increase in violence against women in her community to the collapse of the fur trade. How can you suggest to people whose culture has for 10,000 years been based on hunting and sharing meat, that they might want to consider vegetarianism?

Helen Falding  
Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada

## Reservations unlimited

I have just returned from New Mexico where I visited a large Navajo/ Hopi Native American Indian reservation where levels of poverty, suicide and lack of self-reliance are worse than those in many Third World countries. The

really disgraceful aspect of this is that the reservation is situated in the middle of the richest, most powerful nation on earth.

Andrew Ashenhurst  
London, UK

## Algae solution

The present famine in Ethiopia need not have happened. Just a few miles away from where people are starving the world's most potent food is multiplying naturally and rotting away in three giant lakes. The food is Spirulina – a blue-green algae, which is the richest source of protein yet discovered. The algae also contains twice as much Vitamin B12 as liver – the commonly accepted major source – and a massive concentration of other vitamins, minerals and important nutrients.

This algae is a total food source: a Japanese philosopher lived for 15 years off it alone. One acre can produce enough food to feed 400 people a year without fertile land, fresh water, pesticides or herbicides. Ironically Ethiopia is one of the very few places where this algae grows naturally. And the money needed to provide harvesting equipment, a factory and the necessary machinery to solve Ethiopia's food problems is only a fraction of the emergency relief now being provided.

Sam St Clair-Ford  
Managing Director  
Life Stream Research,  
Stedham, UK



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# LETTER FROM TAMIL NADU

## Assassination



**The murder of India's Prime Minister has thrown the entire subcontinent into chaos. Mari Marcel Thekaekara reflects on the meaning of Rajiv Gandhi's death.**

**T**HE news of Rajiv Gandhi's murder shattered the nation. Despite over a decade of terrorism, the Indian psyche refuses to become inured to violence. Even in the capital, Delhi, murders still create shock waves.

It is difficult to conceive of anyone hating Rajiv Gandhi, he had such charm and personality. Travelling to Delhi soon after the Bofors Scandal broke – Gandhi was suspected of having accepted bribes from the Swedish arms manufacturer – I wondered why the more decent Congress politicians still stuck to him. The answer became apparent at a ceremony there.

Rajiv's arrival was heralded by the glamorous Black Cat Commandos. There was a fanfare of music. A hushed silence. He strode in like a film-star. And the crowd screamed its adulation. The people around adored him. Bofors paled into insignificance. Rajiv, the man, floored everyone.

The news of his death seemed unreal despite the gruesome photographs of his body splattered all over the floor; how could so individual a personality suddenly be gone? It was as if he'd merged with the masses he had been determined to reach in his last battle for power.

He didn't deserve such a brutal end. When he entered the political arena in 1984, he brought hope to the nation's millions. He was young. Clean. He held promise for the future.

Somewhere along the line, the halo clanged to the ground with reverberations that echoed around the world. Yet whatever one thought of Rajiv the politician – his naiveté, his colossal blunders – Rajiv the person, remained in everyone's eyes the original nice guy who wanted to clean up the country; whose intentions were good. He blundered because of a coterie of crooks and charlatans surrounding him.

On the morning of Rajiv's funeral I woke up conscious of the reassuring warmth of my sleeping husband, the sounds of the children playing. My thoughts went to Sonia Gandhi and I shivered, chilled by the

spectre of her loneliness; the tragedy of her personal loss. Sonia Gandhi sacrificed her husband, and her children their father, to the country. The thought will bring them cold comfort in the bleak days ahead. Yet salute them one must. The family have lived on a tightrope ever since Rajiv accepted the Prime Ministership after his mother's assassination.

Few people *want* to end up martyrs. And Rajiv's death won't inspire people to follow in his shoes. Yet the time has come for all good people to come to the aid of the country. We seem to be teetering on the brink of disaster.

More than ever before we need clear-headed, right thinking people to enter the political arena. Ordinary decent citizens abhor politics. It is a dirty word. But if upright people refuse to pick up the gauntlet, doesn't it leave the battleground free for the hoodlums, the terrorists and the corrupt? Do we not then get the governments we deserve?

The scenario is not particularly Indian. It amazes me that the Reagans and Bushes of America continue their election victories so easily. Indeed, across the globe there isn't much to choose from in the way of politicians with integrity. The best people shrink from the enormity of the battle; the seeming futility of it all.

Yet in every party there are a few impressive individuals. They stand out. A small number of honest men and women continue to fight for justice and peace; for value-based politics. And it is time that men and women of worth jumped into the fray and took charge of the governance of India. It happened once before, when the best forces in this subcontinent put aside their differences and fought together for a common cause. Briefly. For freedom for the motherland from the British.

India needs leaders with integrity like it never did before. The victims of violence cry out for justice; for peace; for a time of healing. Power-hungry politicians with scant regard for the nations' welfare continue their games of manipulation and power-brokering. They pit Indian against Indian; Hindus against Muslims; Sikhs against their non-Sikh brothers and sisters. On the basis of language, religion and caste, divisions and schisms are created where none existed. Discord and hate is stirred up where there was harmony. Everyone agrees that it must be stopped. But no-one wants to dirty their hands by doing the work.

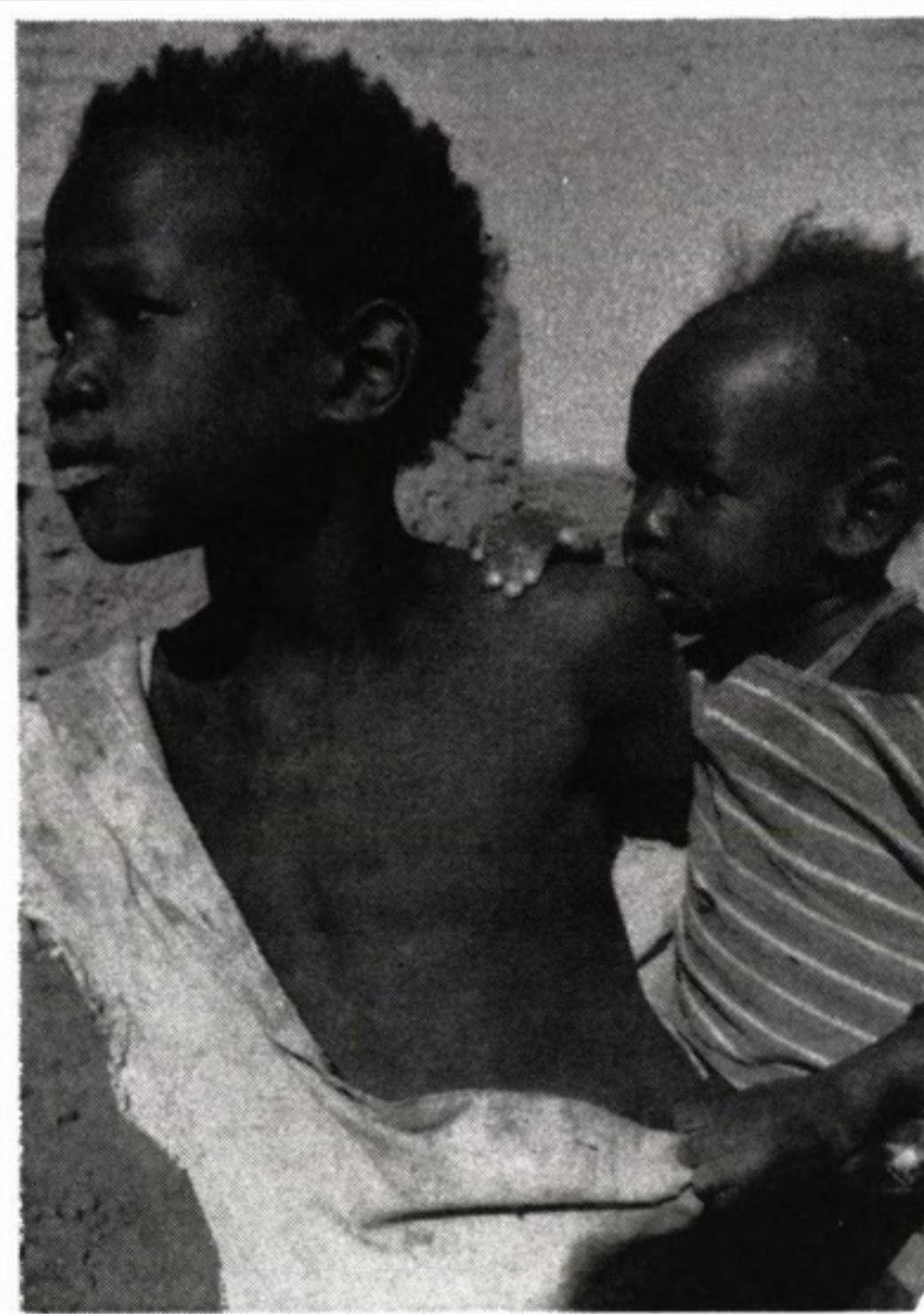
The violence and hatred must end. Time and again, it is the hour of crisis which produces leaders who restore one's faith in humankind. The Martin Luther Kings, the Mahatma Gandhis emerged from periods of great suffering and anguish. We await the new order. It must come from the people.

*Mari Marcel Thekaekara has been working for the last seven years on a project she and her husband started for native people in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.*



**Chris Brazier explains  
why the poor are besieged  
from all sides.**

## RESPONDING TO THIRD WORLD DISASTERS



**W**E'RE overwhelmed, what can we do? The images and tragedies pour down like bitter rain, sweeping the sweet taste of the Cold War's end and 'the peace dividend' away like so much flotsam and jetsam. 1991 has been as much a year of disasters as 1989 was a year of hope.

The Kurds shivering on their mountainside, trapped between the Devil they call Saddam and the Deep Blue Sea of 'careful' Western diplomacy. Africans – Ethiopians and Sudanese, Mozambicans and Somalians – playing out yet again that most dreadful of human dramas, the relentless descent into starvation and extinction. Bangladeshis consumed in an apocalypse of wind and tide. Filipinos fleeing the wrath of the Pinatubo volcano.

Faced with so much suffering, so many thousands dying, it is hardly surprising that we turn our faces away and try to get on with our daily lives, persuaded by the sheer scale of the tragedies that this is the only sensible response.

It may be an understandable response. But it is also a very convenient one for the West as a whole because it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we assume there is nothing we can do bar sending a few planes full of emergency aid, then the forces that render the Third World more vulnerable to these kinds of disasters will continue to bear down and leave us feeling still more powerless. To the old phrase 'the poor are

always with us' we will add 'and they'll always be afflicted by disasters'.

Only if we decide that they should be. Because disasters are not, as we prefer to think, natural events, Acts of God beyond human ken and control. The most violent earthquake on record will not be a disaster if it takes place in an unpopulated desert. But a mild earth tremor will be a disaster of major proportions if it dislodges shanty towns built, out of poverty, on the edge of a ravine.

**Letter, Guatemala 1988:** *I grew up thinking people were crazy to live in San Francisco above a fault line just waiting to whip back. Yet here in Guatemala City, where 23,000 people died in a cataclysmic quake in 1976, there are people living in shacks perched over a sheer ravine – and they are apparently quite sane. What else can they do? Here the land costs nothing. Here they can scrape a living. Their poverty, and the risks it forces them to take, make the boastful Americanized fast-food gloss of this capital's centre – so striking after the enforced austerity of Nicaragua – very difficult to take.*

Earthquakes and hurricanes, floods and droughts, will always happen. But it is human society which determines who will suffer from them. And throughout the world it decides to put the same people in the firing line – the poor.

The cyclone in Bangladesh this year was a classic illustration of this terrifying global principle. The people who died on those tiny low-lying islands in the Ganges Delta knew full well that one day a huge storm was likely to engulf them. But while cyclones happen every year in the Bay of Bengal, it had been 21 years since the last one of truly catastrophic proportions. And when you and your family are landless and hungry you have to take survival decisions day by day. You cannot afford to worry about a disaster that may happen next year or next decade if your family faces hunger here and now.

The poor here were failed at two key points. Either their own long-term problem of landlessness and poverty could have been dealt with. Or else, knowing that this was not going to happen, they could have been protected with at least another 500 community shelters to add to the 300 which saved so many lives this time. But there is no way that Bangladesh, the fifth poorest nation on this earth, could have brought about even this option on its own – the shelters would have cost about \$35 million, which is peanuts to a Western country but a vast sum to them.





Photo : Chris Steele-Perkins/Magnum

**At the edge of existence. Ethiopians in 1984 boiled leaves to stave off starvation. Why should they be pushed back to the brink so soon?**

It is the same the world over: the poorer societies on the planet bear a disproportionate share of the burden. This is not just because there are more cyclones and volcanoes in tropical countries; it is because a rich country can afford to look after its population and prepare for the worst.

The US plains suffer from severe drought every 20 years or so. But farmers there are insulated against starvation because there is enough general wealth to bolster them up in emergencies and stop it happening. Similarly the 1988 earthquake in Armenia was of the same force as that in San Francisco in 1989; yet while the Soviet one killed 25,000, the US one killed just 62. Even within rich countries the rule that the poor suffer most will operate – as when warnings about imminent floods in the Australian town of Alice Springs were broadcast on channels unused by Aboriginal people living in the most vulnerable housing on the lowest-lying land.

But still rich countries are less at risk. Not everyone could be as prepared as the Californians (see Page 19). But the Third World could be much better prepared if only the West were willing to put its long-term development money where its emergency-relief mouth is.

**Diary entry, Indonesia 1981:** *I went down to Tanjung Priok this morning. There Jakarta's poor have been pushed by desperation or lack of alternatives into building huts on stilts over the water. As I plodded along the narrow plank walkways I responded in kind to the chirpy children and general good humour but underneath I*

*was raging. I find it staggering to think that people have been living in these conditions without my knowing anything about it. Why isn't everyday poverty like this headline news, screamed from the rooftops as an indignity that humans in the late twentieth century should not have to bear?*

TV journalists love disasters. There is no point in blaming them for this because, to be honest, we give them every encouragement. No-one in their right minds wants there to be a flood in India or an earthquake in Indiana. But there is certainly a part of us which expects that kind of drama on our evening news. We are accustomed to high drama – even addicted to it. When something momentous happens in the world these days we expect to see the wind still blowing, the waters still rising, the volcano still blowing its top.

But we also expect the story to be wrapped up and go away quickly. In its place we expect to be offered drama from another quarter and if the best we can get is a political slugging match between Bob Hawke and Paul Keating or a play-off in the US Open Golf then that'll have to do.

This way of looking at things means that a certain category of disaster has maximum appeal. It will have a sudden impact – an earthquake or a tidal wave, perhaps. It will have helpless victims wrenching our heartstrings. And it will have heroic rescuers and medical workers, if possible from our own neck of the woods – dedicated Dr Smith from Utttoxeter or Utah. The Colombian mudslide caused by a volcanic eruption in

1985 was one such. Because it fitted the Western expectations of a disaster it received massive coverage. Though even then it is likely that what you, like me, remember is not the 21,800 people who died but one child who, against the odds, was rescued after days in the mud.

Governments and even relief workers are also prone to be misled by their expectations of a disaster. Aid worker Andrew Maskrey calls this the '*kitsch* script'. His experience of Peru's Alto Mayo earthquake in 1990 led him to conclude that agencies intervening in emergencies often do so 'following a pre-elaborated and fictitious script of how the drama is supposed to unfold. This *kitsch* version of disaster relief seems to respond more to the expectations of the mass media and its readers than to the reality in which the disaster has occurred – and in turn reinforces those expectations by providing and feeding the same comforting images.'

To take just one example, one of the basic suppositions of the *kitsch* script is that food is essential after any disaster, no matter where it is. So in Alto Mayo much of the effort went into getting food to the area. Yet in the months before the earthquake local community organizations had been on strike demanding that the Government buy and transport away tens of thousands of tons of rice and maize which were starting to rot in the region's overflowing warehouses. To complete the irony, the emergency supplies included sacks of rice imported from abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Another of our expectations is that anything we send out of the goodness of our





**A tear in the eye of the world: four-year-old Guillermo Paez is rescued from the mud of the Colombian volcano disaster in 1985.**

hearts to disaster victims will be useful. Yet many of the medicines sent to Armenia after the 1988 earthquake were inadequately described or labelled in any of 21 foreign languages; others were time-expired. The local authorities decided to burn those that they could not use. But because of the risk of dangerous fumes being released, a special costly incinerator had to be purchased abroad and imported.<sup>2</sup>

**Letter, Nicaragua 1988:** *The first impression of Managua is of a ghost town. It is a capital without a capital letter in front of it; a city whose heart has been ripped out and left casually by the roadside. From its ruined cathedral to its nameless streets it still bears eerie testimony to the earthquake that destroyed it in 1972 – and to the greed transcendent of Somoza, who siphoned into his own bottomless pockets all the international aid that poured in. It's a reminder that when a disaster happens you can't just tear up all your careful, sensitive rules about giving aid.*

Because our collective attention-span is short, our political representatives tend to send off a hastily assembled shipment of emergency aid and then pass on. Often there is not even the will to see the initial relief programme through to reconstruction. After Hurricane Hugo had devastated the Caribbean island of St Lucia in 1989 its Prime Minister said: 'The response from the international community has started to come in... We appreciate the immediate response. But we are looking for continued assistance over the long run to re-establish the infrastructure.'<sup>2</sup> All too often such follow-up help is not forthcoming.

There are disasters, of course, which don't fit anyone's script; notably drought and the famine which can follow it, which are months or even years in the making. Few media representatives are as brazen as the one from the UK's notoriously gutter-hugging *Sun* newspaper who, just

before the Ethiopian famine became a major public concern in 1984, rejected pictures of it saying 'We're actually not interested in famine'.<sup>3</sup> But many others would have dressed up effectively the same message in less honest clothes – and have done so again this year as another major famine has loomed into view.

Aid agencies have been warning for at least 18 months that a major famine in the Horn of Africa was likely, and warning that it was imminent and certain since Christmas. Yet public and media interest has been minimal. Why? Is it because we feel we've heard it all before, that six years is too short a gap between famines in the same place? Or is it that we feel they really ought to have got their own act together in the interim? Whatever the reason, there are Somalis dying of starvation in the Ogaden as I write these words, and our easy acceptance of that helps show the politicians and the global financiers that they do not have to care.

**NI Keynote, Burkina Faso 1985:** *The widow leant back against the mud wall of her compound and gestured at the bowl of baobab leaves in front of her. 'Since our millet ran out,' she said, 'we've been living on those.' Suddenly the tranquillity of the scene, so striking after the flurry of activity in the other family compounds, took on a sinister aspect, as if it were haunted by the ghosts of her hunger... Once I had flown back to the West, there was one question that people always asked me first: 'but what did you eat?' The answer, of course, is that there was plenty of food in Burkina Faso, just as there is in Ethiopia – if you have the money to pay for it... It is poverty that starves people to death or stupefaction: not a callous whim of nature.*

The current cholera epidemic in Latin America is another classic case of a genuine disaster that doesn't fit the West's script. If we could deal with it by sending in expert teams to inoculate everyone in sight what a great story that would be! How we saved a continent!

But we can't do that. There can be no quick fix, no interventionist miracle provided by the wonders of Western technology or medical genius. Cholera is erupting because people are poor, because they don't have the decent water and sanitation services that they deserve. According to Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, Director-General of the World Health Organization: 'The current cholera epidemic in Peru is the worst visible symptom of a much greater public-health problem, which is an inadequate health infrastructure, poor water supply and sanitation, and lack of food safety for large sections of the population.'<sup>4</sup>

As the disease stretches its fingers across the continent it is like a litmus test showing up on the map all the pockets of unnecessary and indecent suffering, all the *favelas* and shanty towns. We can say that Latin American countries should do more

to confront their own inequalities and do away with such poverty. But they are likely to find the advice bitterly comical after a decade in which the primary message from the West has been delivered by the IMF and goes something like: 'You must pay your debts by slashing public spending and letting the free market do its work. Sorry if that means you can't spend money on services for the poor (including water and sanitation) but that's the way it is.'

We're reaching the heart of the matter. There is no cure for cholera but development and justice – over-used words but no less meaningful for that. And that is even more true of the great disaster that goes unreported precisely because it is with us all the time. It is indeed horrific that 140,000 people died in the Bangladesh cyclone. But it is even more terrible that about the same number of Bangladeshi children under five die from diarrhoea and pneumonia every three months.<sup>5</sup>

This is information that we would rather not be given. We can focus on the sudden anguish of someone injured or bereaved by an earthquake because we know that will pass. Even the coruscating images of famine will be left behind in weeks or months. But the death by malnutrition or disease – effectively by poverty – of 40,000 of the world's children under five every single day<sup>5</sup> is unbearable, a knowledge we have to screen out in the interests of retaining our sanity. We would be utterly unable to cope with a news programme that told us every evening these 'true facts' about our world.

Yet we have to find some way of living with the knowledge and using it to campaign for a sea change in global priorities. Otherwise our silence will be offering its own endorsement of the present set-up.

Does anybody seriously believe that famines would still happen in the Third World if preventing them were high on the international political agenda? If the same resources, technological know-how and strength of purpose were brought to bear on famine in poor countries as were dedicated to rescuing one tiny, undemocratic rich country from the clutches of Iraq, does anybody doubt that the obscenity of famine could be outlawed at a stroke?

All that is missing is the political will. The George Bushes and John Majors, the Jim Bolgers and Brian Mulroneys of this world are not entirely to be blamed. Their political will (or lack of it) is supplied by the interests and enthusiasms of their electorates. And if most of us are more concerned about the dollar in our pocket than we are about ridding the world of famine, the politicians will continue floating lazily on the ocean of our unconcern. □

<sup>1</sup> *Disaster Mitigation in a Social Vacuum – The Alto Mayo Earthquake*, Andrew Maskrey. A paper delivered to the Royal Geographic Society Conference on Disasters in London, April 1991. <sup>2</sup> *World Health*, WHO Geneva, Jan-Feb 1991. <sup>3</sup> *News Out of Africa*, Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer (Hilary Shipman 1986). <sup>4</sup> WHO press release, April 1991. <sup>5</sup> Calculated from current UNICEF figures.



# Disasters – a satirical view

by NI cartoonists  
Martyn Turner,  
Christian and  
P. J. Polyp.  
Polyp's new  
strip *Big  
Bad World*  
makes its  
debut  
next  
month.



STARVATION HAUNTS  
THE HORN OF  
AFRICA



TYPHOONS KILL 140,000  
IN BANGLADESH



CHOLERA THREATENS  
MILLIONS IN LATIN  
AMERICA

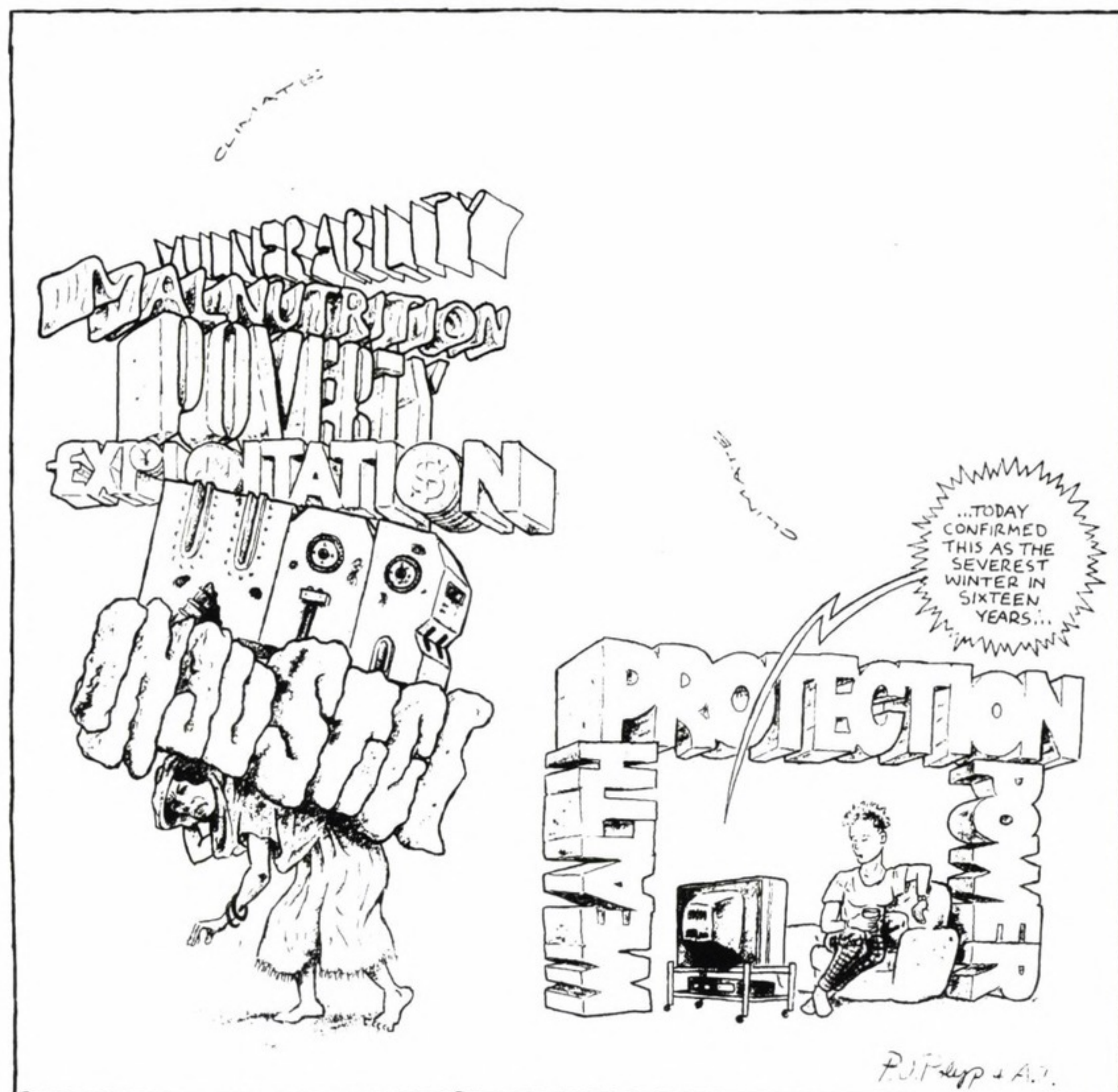


EARTHQUAKES ROCK  
COSTA RICA



THE STRAW THAT  
BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK...

...AND THE  
ONE THAT DIDN'T



ALL THESE EVENTS ARE  
TRAGEDIES BUT THEY  
MAINLY AFFECT THE  
POOR



WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR  
IS A CAUSE THAT WILL  
GALVANIZE THE OUT-  
RAGE OF US IN THE  
MIDDLE-CLASS



NO  
NEW  
TAXES



CHRISTIAN





## Infotainment

**Why does African famine only hit the headlines when it is too late? Who decides when a disaster is a disaster? Peter Stalker comes up with a new name for the editors and journalists of TV news – storytellers.**

**'A** DISASTER is only a disaster if it appears on TV,' said a Red Cross official in Geneva recently – lamenting that the much-televised refugee Kurds seemed to merit a Wembley concert, though the African famine might have had a more pressing need for funds. But why don't all such disasters get the same treatment on television?

After four decades of TV news reporting we are no closer to accepting that it is founded on a fiction. This is the myth of information: the idea that there is, outside our consciousness, a collection of facts floating around which diligent newspeople gather and sift on our behalf. These facts are then fired at us with maximum momentum so that, like sharp and polished bullets, they impact dramatically on our consciousness. But facts are nothing like bullets. Indeed it may make more sense to assume that facts don't really exist at all.

A simple enough clue comes from the word itself. A fact is something which is made – as in a *factory*. It doesn't arise spontaneously and have an independent existence. Facts are things which humans make to describe the world around them.

Say you visit Peru and find out about

the cholera epidemic there (see Page 20). On your return you will want to talk about it. You might even remember some statistics which help you sound authoritative. But you won't want to bore people. So you will probably try to recount your experience and talk about people you met. And you will discuss things other than cholera. The climate, perhaps, or the extraordinary number of people who wear tracksuits, or the opulence of the Miraflores district of Lima. All this time looking at your listener to gauge if you are creating the intended impression.

The facts that you would include are really the elements of a story. Indeed it is impossible to have facts without a story. Information has to fit into some context or it is meaningless marks on paper, or vague vibrations in the air. Television works in much the same way. Its facts may seem more objective, coming from remote authority figures – rather than from a friend whose powers of judgment you are in a good position to evaluate (and doubt). But the process is the same – storytelling.

TV stories, like any other, have to have a plot and at least one character. So there are heroes and eccentrics, villains and vic-

tims. There is no escaping this. Thus President Bush may be portrayed on the news as the heroic leader of Desert Storm, or the cynical politician who lured the Kurds to disaster. He cannot appear with no role, otherwise his appearance would be meaningless. This dramatic element is not merely some bias or twist which unscrupulous presenters add afterwards. It is absolutely necessary to comprehension. Without it there is no story.

But TV news telling is crude. The tales have to be simplified and stylized because of the limitations of the medium. For one thing, communication is entirely one-way and inflexible. Reporters can only guess at the viewer's state of mind; no chance of changing tack in mid-sentence if they detect a lack of comprehension or interest. So the stories have to follow accepted patterns. Villains and victims have to be established as unambiguously as possible.

### Sunsets are unsuitable

Disaster reporting, for example, has its own conventions. People who are in trouble should not be shown smiling, though they may well do so out of politeness. And curious neighbourhood children should certainly not be allowed to grin at the camera since this makes reality look very confusing. People who are ill should look ill on the screen. Their families should preferably be weeping. It doesn't matter if there is a beautiful sunset. Cut!

Once a suitably edited disaster has been pulled down from the satellite it can be added to the general flow. While one channel reports on the Bangladesh



cyclone others might be showing a man beating his wife in *LA Law*, or a soccer report showing a nasty foul, or even Lady Macbeth wandering around with a bloody dagger. And with a zapper at your fingertips you can idly hop from one to another and come away with much the same mixture of shock and boredom from each.

### A world of its own

This flattening process is a peculiar characteristic of television. You'd be rather disturbed in real life if such things popped up in front of you in quick succession, but on TV this is normal; it is expected. TV may seem to offer a window on reality but it is actually a world of its own.

You may well protest that you watch the news to find out what is happening in the world. But don't be so sure. Try to remember what was on last night's news. Don't try to guess what must have been on it. Recall the actual items. Surveys of people watching the news show that at least half of those questioned *immediately after* the bulletin can remember nothing at all of what they have seen. Once a news report has served its primary entertainment function we discard most of it.

The central aim of the news is to keep the viewer serviced with entertaining images – 'infotainment' is the current buzzword. Programmes tend to follow a certain pattern. Like a Beethoven symphony they often start with a crashing chord, either musical or vocal, to shake the viewer out of apathy and raise anxieties which only continued viewing can resolve. The stories are played out, jumping rapidly from one to the next to maintain the sense of urgency. Then at the end calm is restored, the world's problems have been explained to us and we are assured that everything is all right really. To make sure that we *feel* all right they finish up with soothing trivia about animals or royalty, a joke between the presenters and a contemplation of eternity in the form of a weather map.

But what should go into the show between the dramatic opening and the soothing resolution? 'News value' determines the content. True enough. But since

news value seems only to indicate merely 'the kind of thing which appears on the news' this doesn't get us very far.

Importance, maybe. That's difficult to measure. Even if you took needless and culpable loss of human life in your own country as your criterion you would finish up with a bulletin which was little more than a daily litany of road accidents and lung-cancer victims to which the car and cigarette companies would certainly object.

No, news is what makes a good show. TV storytellers try to judge what will excite the viewer, partly by following their own nose and partly by following the herd.

One persistent demand is that news should be new. But this criterion is generally met in the most trivial sense. Most news stories refer to a continuous process; what may be new is that someone has *talked* about it today, although this is usually referred to as 'issuing a statement' – which makes it sound more like a fact.

Novelty is even more contrived when news editors have merely chosen to broadcast something on a particular day. The Ethiopian famine of 1984 is one of the clearest examples of this.<sup>1</sup>

Warnings of impending catastrophe started to appear in 1982 yet were largely ignored. Coverage only started when a British TV crew in Ethiopia (not a news crew, and not the BBC) came back with footage of the refugees at Korem. They went to the UK voluntary agencies who were able to use it to launch a joint TV appeal in July 1984. The BBC decided that it too should have footage so reporter Michael Buerk rushed in and out. The appeal was quite successful. But the BBC did not consider the story very significant and used it midway through a bulletin.

The disaster only hit the headlines at the second attempt. This was on the initiative of local camera operator Mohammed Amin of the Visnews agency (who had vainly been reporting on the story for some time). He was to go with a BBC radio reporter. But at the last minute Buerk also hitched a ride since BBC TV might be interesting to see how the appeal money had been spent. The team discov-

ered that this was not the story at all – the real point was that the situation had got dramatically worse. The radio reporter was able to transmit this information while the crew were still in Ethiopia – but his report was largely ignored.

When Amin's film with Buerk's commentary arrived at the BBC it was a slack news day. As the BBC's John Simpson put it: 'We could have led with any of a handful of stories... in the end it was decided to try an imaginative lead'. So the 'biblical famine' finally became a British TV disaster. Visnews also offered Amin's film to NBC in New York. Initially they turned it down. Only pressure from their London bureau caused them eventually to run the story as the last item on the nightly news.

'The effect of the NBC report was electrifying,' says Robert Lamb, who was filming at the UN at the time. 'Suddenly the *New York Times* and other papers were running front-page stories. From nowhere the crisis in Africa became the lead item on the agenda at the General Assembly.'

### A call for modesty

The BBC seems to claim a lot of credit for telling this story, but in retrospect its role was as muddled as everyone else's. Television proved itself incapable of communicating until it had a tellable story – in this case when the body count was high enough. And even then it happened half by chance. This was not because of a lack of facts – the famine was out there all the time. Nor of knowledge, since even the journalists knew about it – they just didn't think it would make good television or that viewers would be interested. They were proved dramatically wrong on both counts.

The real problem with TV news is that it promises too much, and we foolishly expect it to deliver. A bit more modesty on the part of broadcasters, and much more scepticism from viewers, would restore a bit of sanity. There are many other sources of information to which governments and the UN might sensibly pay more attention; in the case of disasters the voluntary-agency people on the spot are usually the most reliable.

The daily papers are also a much better source of information. Yet they do not claim to *be* the news; they mostly have distinctive names like *The Globe and Mail*, *The Age* or *The Independent*, implying that this is someone's view of the world rather than the events themselves.

Maybe, after all this, television should now humbly withdraw the word 'news' from TV bulletins. If the BBC's Nine O'Clock News were called *The Kate Adie Show* and CBS nightly news were *Dan Rather Tonight* we would all have a better idea of what is going on. □

**A long-time co-editor of the NI, Peter Stalker is currently working for the International Labour Office in Geneva.**



**The film that helped save thousands: Mohammed Amin of Visnews with Ethiopians in 1984.**

<sup>1</sup> The example is neatly summarized in *Television and the Ethiopian Famine, From Buerk to Band Aid* by Greg Philo and Robert Lamb, Television Trust for the Environment 1991.



# The wind, the wave and the forgotten

**Arshad Mahmud visits the Bangladeshis ravaged by April's cyclone – and explains how they could be protected next time.**

**O**N a May afternoon at Santoshpur – a remote village on the island of Sandwip – a middle-aged woman, her chin resting on her folded hands, squatted on a muddy ridge overlooking the spot of mud where her thatched hut had once stood. Emaciated and grim, with years of hard labour etched into her face, Hasina Begum bemoaned her fate. She had survived the cyclone – and the six-metre tidal surge that slammed into her village – but she had lost her husband and her seven-year-old only son. The loss of her loved ones had made her half mad. When asked what had happened she only howled: 'Why

did I survive, why did I survive?'

The horror of the storm had passed. But now, lacking shelter, food and safe water, she faced the possibility of a slow, wrenching death from hunger and disease.

More than a month after the cyclone struck the south-east coast of Bangladesh – killing nearly 140,000 people, leaving over ten million homeless and destroying property worth two billion dollars – emergency food and supplies had reached most areas. This was due to the efforts of both national and international relief agencies – most notably the involvement of the US task force in the relief operation.

But the stepped-up operation hardly guaranteed any improvement in Hasina Begum's condition, simply because of the enormous difficulty of getting supplies to her remote village. Communications were almost non-existent, bridges and culverts had been swept away and the unpaved roads (there's not a single paved road in the village) had been washed out.

Bullock carts and rickshaws – which are the only mode of transportation – could not operate because their wheels got stuck in the mud. Food and other supplies had been delivered to the nearby town of Santoshpur but could get no further. The great fear was that people in remote villages and on offshore islands were quietly starving.

Even if no-one was starving, nearly everyone was hungry. And now that the cyclone had levelled everything, now that it had swept away their huts and their loved ones, now that they had lost everything they had, their burden of poverty would be more unbearable than ever.

## Pressure on the poor

Like Hasina Begum hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis have been living on innumerable alluvial islands like Sandwip, known as *chars*. The drama of the world's expanding population is played out here in the starkest terms as overcrowding on the mainland drives the poor and landless deeper into more perilous portions of the Delta, where they battle for survival against nature and one another.

In the competition to cultivate these shifting, inhospitable spits of land, hundreds die each year as they fight each other with knives and clubs for homesteads. On 14 May, for example, two weeks after the cyclone, a man was murdered in Sandwip by his own nephew. A row broke out between the two over some possessions they were trying to salvage from under their flattened homes.

'The pressure on the land in Bangladesh is so overwhelming that it leaves little choice for the poorest segment of the population but to move to vulnerable chars and settle down,' says Aminul Islam, Professor of Geography at Dhaka University. More than 115 million people are packed into an area about the size of England and Wales – and one-fifth of that area is water, as two great river systems, the Ganges and Brahmaputra, converge to form the largest delta in the world.

The paucity of habitable land is further aggravated as widespread deforestation helps erosion by the rivers. Erosion can eat away more than a kilometre of riverbank in a year, and sometimes entire towns are imperilled. Chandpur town, for instance, is today fighting off the encroachment of the Meghna River. Vast areas of the town have already disappeared into the river, including its main marketplace and its railway station.

The shifting landscape of Bangladesh increases the hardship of an impoverished



**High Street Kamalapur. The cyclone caused even more devastation than the 1988 floods.**



population. At least 30 per cent of the people cannot find paid work or are underemployed, mostly as agricultural labourers. More than 50 per cent are considered landless by the Government, and 70 per cent live below the poverty line – set not in terms of money but as a daily intake of 2,100 calories. It is these landless, undernourished people who find their way onto the coast and the islands formed by silt in the Bay of Bengal – and who become easy prey when disasters strike.

'In a way they're a disposable lot and nobody really cares about them,' said a relief worker. 'That's why you never get any accurate statistics about them – like how many people live there, how many *chars* there are and so on.'

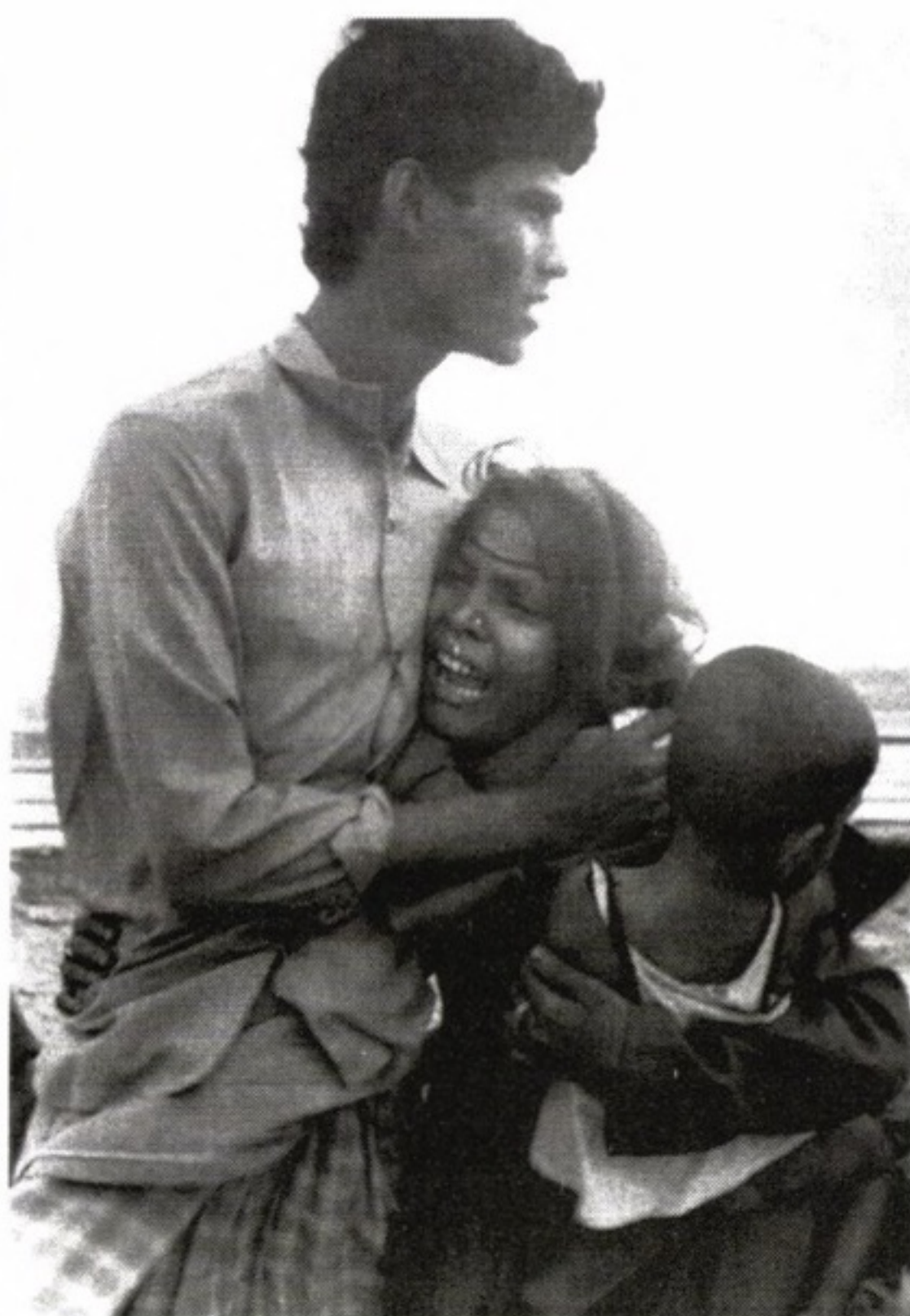
The *char* people in turn feel they are forgotten, left to fend for themselves – which is why they don't really look towards the authorities in times of calamity. The sheer inaccessibility of their islands has further reinforced this feeling. Sandwip, for example, can only be reached twice a week by passenger ship in normal times. Rough sea and high winds often reduce the frequency. Economic development in the area seems to have been frozen in time.

Sandwip is considered better off than many of the other islands off the south-east coast. Yet in the whole of the 220-square-kilometre island there are no more than five kilometres of paved roads. Getting from one place to another is very difficult even in normal times and communication during the rainy season is a nightmare. None of the villages has electricity, telephone or running water.

My 27-kilometre journey from Santoshpur to Haramia, another village, by motorbike, boat, rickshaw and foot proved that the *chars* are a world apart. There were hardly any concrete or brick buildings besides the couple of dozen belonging to the Government. This helps explain why 98 per cent of the houses on the island were destroyed or badly damaged.

The journey offered a grim picture. Flattened houses, debris and uprooted trees were to be seen on both sides of the road. Corrugated metal sheets, plastic sheeting and household utensils were strewn all around. The nauseating stench of putrefying flesh, faeces and urine hung over the island. Sandwip lost 40,000 of its people as well as countless animals.

'We issued repeated warnings to the people over the radio, megaphone and other means, but they apparently were unmoved,' says Major Mohammad Abdul Khaleque, commander of the Bangladesh Rifles, a paramilitary force, in the coastal town of Cox's Bazar. It is not unusual for island people to ignore the authorities' calls to evacuate to safer places in the face of impending disaster. This is partly because so many of the calls turn out to be false alarms, and partly because they are convinced they have no alternative but to live with calamities anyway. But it is



**We're the lucky ones? Survival in Kutubdia.**

mainly for the simple reason that there are hardly any solid structures to which they could evacuate.

Major Khaleque confirms the last point. 'Frankly speaking,' he hastens to add, 'there were not enough shelters for people to move to.' Only 22 cyclone shelters were available in Sandwip on the night of 29 April. Since each of these can contain 800 people, it means that under six per cent of the island's 300,000 population could have taken refuge.

### Shelter from the storm

Bangladesh's perilous geographical location makes it naturally disaster-prone. Cyclones are inevitable – but the fearful death toll is not. Tens of thousands of lives that were swept away at the end of April could have been saved.

Nevertheless there were fewer people killed this time than in the great cyclone of 1970, believed to be the world's biggest ever natural disaster, in which at least 300,000 lives were snuffed out in the space of a few hours. The reduction in death toll this time is mostly due to the Cyclone Preparedness Programme, run by the Government's Red Crescent Society. But this consciousness raising is not enough: physical defences are necessary too and the Government's contribution to those has been marginal since the late 1970s, when it last built concrete cyclone shelters. The only shelters built in the last decade have been the 60 contributed by various national Red Cross societies.

In the whole of Bangladesh, some 300 shelters were available on the night when the cyclone hit – woefully inadequate for the ten million people in the danger areas, one million of them on the horribly vulnerable low-lying islands.

Yet the good that shelters can do was demonstrated on the tiny island of Sonadia, where the entire population of 700 was saved. One of the newer shelters

is there. V-shaped, pointing like an arrow into the prevailing wind, it stands on four-metre stilts. It's the only solid structure on the island; Sonadia's only schoolroom and community centre as well as its shelter.

When the danger signal was issued, as everywhere else, the people of Sonadia were reluctant to leave their homes and possessions unguarded – a reflection of the cruel reality that these are more valuable than their lives. Red Crescent volunteers received a radio message from their Dhaka office and urged people to move to the shelter. No-one heeded them until the wind and sea began to rise but, by the time the full force of the cyclone struck, everyone was huddled on the first floor of the shelter.

Panic-stricken radio calls followed. The water had risen almost to the top of the stairs. Dhaka control room told Sonadia to stay calm and prepare to move to the flat roof. It was not necessary: the surge of water stayed at first-floor level. In 1970 almost every living soul on Sonadia perished. This time the people were saved but everything else was lost.

To blunt the ferocity of cyclones and minimize loss there is an immense amount to be done. According to Emdad Hossain, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme's project director, at least another 500 shelters would be needed to protect the population in the high-risk areas. That is more than 16 times as many as have been built in the past 20 years.

'If you really want to save lives by preparing properly, you not only have to build shelters,' he said. 'You have to strengthen the weather forecasting, and build better warning systems. Then you need more feeder roads for transport and solid embankments. We also need to grow more forests (as a barrier to absorb the shock of the wind and the giant waves).'

The cost, if these things are ever done, will be colossal. One shelter alone costs around \$70,000. Bangladesh, as one of the poorest nations in the world, simply cannot accomplish the task alone. The world community in general and the developed world in particular must contribute in a big way. The dreadful television pictures of the tragedy seem to have shaken their conscience a bit. But that only prompts them to send emergency relief. They proffer that readily, confirmed in their assumption that Bangladesh is a land of perpetual disaster where cure is easier than prevention. But prevention would be possible if only the money were available.

There will be more cyclones. There will be more appalling and unnecessary casualties. That is, unless the First World cares enough about human life to match the killer waves of the Bay of Bengal with a high tide of cash and compassion. □

**Arshad Mahmud is a reporter based in Dhaka who covered the cyclone and its aftermath extensively.**

Photo: Muffy Munir/Popperfoto



# ? Disaster strikes!

And you are in charge of the relief operation. But would you make the right decisions?

## QUESTIONS

**1** Immediately you receive news of the disaster you send out an urgent appeal for international medical personnel.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**2** Through the media you urge people in the West to restrain themselves from collecting and dispatching medicines, clothing and equipment.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**3** The top priority must be gathering and disposing of dead bodies due to the danger of their causing infectious diseases.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**4** It is best to house people as close as possible to their own dwellings rather than in settlement camps.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**5** Food is the top priority after a major disaster in order to avert mass starvation.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**6** In case of limited food supplies following a disaster, priority should be given to the young and the old.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**7** When disaster strikes, each individual should take care of their own family and belongings first.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**8** Your disaster-management role will involve some policing because of the looting and profiteering that always results.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**9** Even weeks after the disaster you must expect things to be far from back to normal and most major services will still not have been restored.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

**10** The disaster will have focussed the world's attention on the plight

of the people you have been helping. You will find it much easier than before to raise the resources to make sure that the next time disaster strikes it does not have such a devastating effect.

☐ Right ☐ Wrong

## ANSWERS

### 1. Wrong

Local health services are normally able to cope in case of disaster. They have the advantage of speaking the local language and are familiar with the health-service infrastructure. Foreign teams may provide specialized skills and equipment but they have to be housed and fed.

### 2. Right

Anything will not do. The last thing local disaster-relief teams want is to be occupied with sorting out aid that might prove useful from the inevitable mass that is not. Concerned people in the West should wait to hear exactly what is wanted or simply give money to agencies who already know the territory.

### 3. Wrong

Bodies do not cause epidemics or transmit diseases during the first 72 hours after death. The top priority must be rescuing and caring for the injured.

### 4. Right

Keeping people as close as possible to their homes is the best option. Settlement camps should be a last resort since they create problems of their own. International assistance in the form of building materials and tools may be desirable.

### 5. Wrong

Though earthquakes do not damage crops, droughts, floods and hurricanes do. But if



storage and rationing of food have been properly organized, there should not be serious hunger. When international assistance is requested, seeds and tools are often more important than food.

### 6. Wrong

Careful rationing should be organized so that everyone is fed. Those involved in salvage work and reconstruction (not usually the youngest or oldest) are particularly in need of a regular food supply.

### 7. Wrong

Team work is the most efficient way of dealing with the aftermath of disaster. Training of teams beforehand so that each person knows their responsibilities is the ideal.

### 8. Wrong

Sensational media reports sometimes suggest that looting and other forms of selfish behaviour are common following disasters. On the contrary, disaster situations tend to bring out the best in people and solidarity is strengthened.



All for one: Leninakan pulls together to rescue victims of Armenia's 1988 earthquake.

Photo : Max Gutierrez/Popperfoto/UPI

Photo : Camera Press



# Thank you Mr President

**The ousting of Ethiopia's dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam, has removed one long-standing obstacle to the fight against famine in Africa. But other countries have similar obstacles. Jonathan Dimbleby sends an open letter to Major-General Omar al-Bashir, President of Sudan.**

Dear President Bashir,

I am sorry that we couldn't meet but I know how busy you must be – what with the civil war and the famine and working out what to do since your friend Saddam Hussein has been in such a spot of bother. But I thought it only right to say how greatly I appreciated my visit to your country. As it was more illuminating than I could have hoped, I have taken the liberty of recording a few of my impressions. I know that you will wish me to express myself somewhat frankly.

You have had to imprison so many intellectuals, writers and journalists that I had assumed the rest of your subjects would have learned to be loyal. Not a bit of it. Of course they don't say what they think on radio or television and they are not allowed to write in the newspapers. However you will be intrigued to hear that in private many people still speak openly about you; indeed some of them are decidedly outspoken, even saying that your regime (their term, not mine) is vicious, corrupt and incompetent.

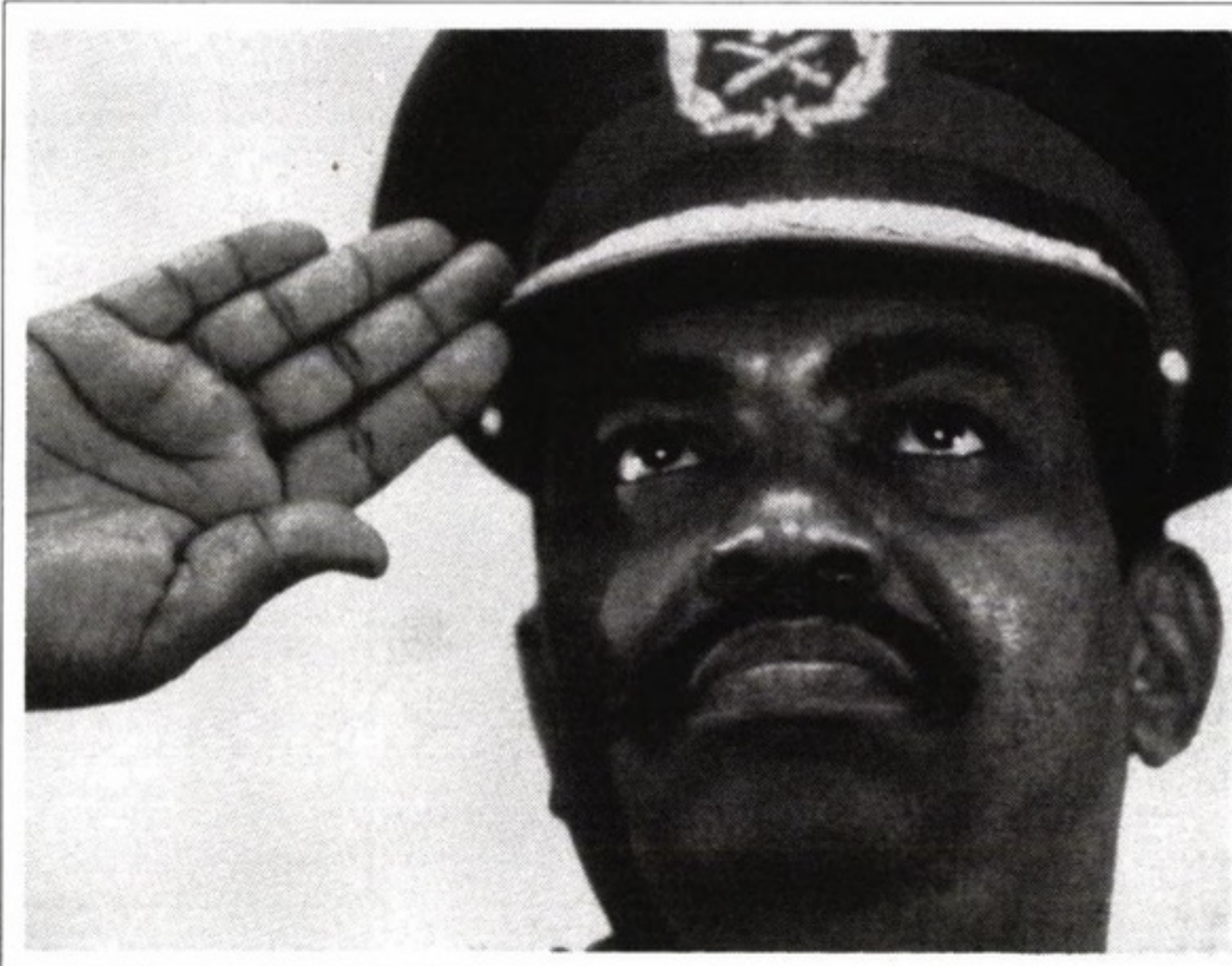
You may know the kind of thing: that your dissidents are tortured; that only Islamic zealots can play any part in the affairs of the nation; that you have brought the country to economic ruin; and that you will lie, lie and lie again to save the regime over which you preside.

Here's a perfect example of what the malcontents get up to. You know all those programmes about you on television? Well, in one of these you were addressing a huge rally in a cornfield. You looked splendid, dressed in that smart uniform with all the medals; the peasants were cheering, and you were making a fiery speech all about the record harvest which you and the Islamic Revolution have brought about in Sudan. You somewhat reminded me of your erstwhile neighbour President Mengistu of

Ethiopia, except of course that he really was a tyrant who got his just come-uppance.

Anyway you gave an impressive performance. Yet do you know what the malcontents said? That your harvest festival was a put-up job, that the cheering crowds were forced to be there and that what you were telling them was – well – a pack of lies.

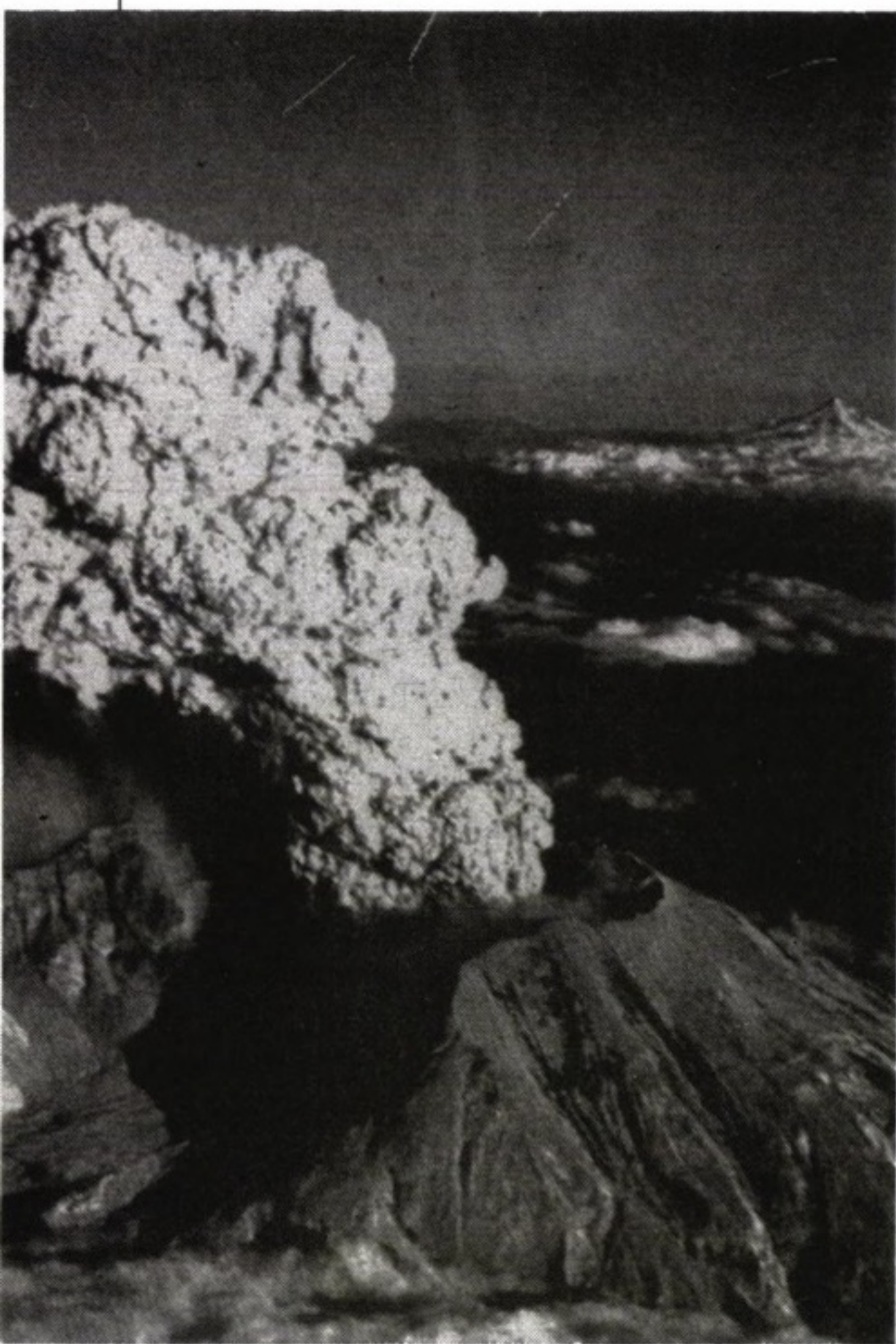
Now of course these malcontents are only a hangover from that chaotic experiment with democracy from which you managed to liberate Sudan a couple of years ago. But in all fairness I could not entirely dismiss what they said. You see I had just come back from a journey deep into the interior. You may remember this since one of your officials told me that the BBC's application



**President Bashir: viciously slandered by disloyal malcontents?**

to film there had been approved by your Revolutionary Command Council – indeed you were kind enough to send along what we call a 'minder' from the Ministry of Information as well as one of your officers from your new Security Department so that we couldn't come to any harm.

In their company we had seen your subjects apparently at the point of starvation – skeletal children wasting away; people scavenging in the desert for wild berries and dried stalks. Now I know one shouldn't be squeamish but it did seem pretty dreadful; in fact, to be honest, quite horrifying. So I'm sure you will understand that I found myself paying rather more attention to those trouble-makers than you might have thought



## 9. Right

Long after the disaster has disappeared from the news headlines, you will still be coping with its effects. The impact may last years. There is often permanent damage to water supplies and health services; and reconstruction is a costly process.

## 10. Wrong

Unfortunately the world's (and especially the media's) attention-span is very limited. You might find yourself deluged with useless materials and personnel from abroad in the first few days after the disaster while it is still a news story. But the world will soon lose interest. You will be able to raise some funds for long-term reconstruction, but nothing like what would be needed to stop your community (and especially its poorer members) being as vulnerable to disaster the next time around.

## SCORE

**8 or over** You have a sound grasp of the complexities of a disaster situation and have thought your way past the most common knee-jerk responses.

**4-7** We're afraid we can't offer you a reference as a disaster-management supremo. But at least you're keen to help in the right way.

**0-3** Steer well clear of disaster situations – you'd be pretty much of a disaster area yourself.

Adapted from an idea by Dorothy Hoffmann and Gilbert Padey of the World Health Organization.



desirable. Indeed, despite strenuous efforts by the Minister of Agriculture for Darfur to reassure me that the harvest had in truth been 'very good' and the farmers were doing 'very well' it was difficult entirely to dismiss the apparent evidence of my own eyes.

In truth, it was even more difficult when it turned out that the dissident view is shared by an awful lot of other people as well; by the United Nations warning of a 'catastrophe' and 'mega-deaths' and the British and US ambassadors using equally apocalyptic terms.

I would venture to suggest that you need help, together with friends who are convinced that you are, how can I put it, serious. And to be very honest, Mr President, you now seem very short of friends indeed. Saddam Hussein is no longer of much use; the Saudis had the temerity to cut off your oil supplies when you spoke out so boldly against them in the name of the Arab nation; the Kuwaitis, wilfully misinterpreting your valiant denunciation of the 'allies' as support for the Iraqi invasion, have suspended all aid. And as if that were not enough, but for strictly financial reasons, the IMF has declared that you are not creditworthy and the banks won't touch you with even the longest and thinnest of bargepoles. It must all seem very unfair, not to say perilous.

May I suggest a possible way out. You could admit error; acknowledge that Sudan does indeed face catastrophe; plead for assistance; invite all the world's media in to witness what is happening; let them do for your peasants what they did for Saddam's Kurds; turn the trickle of relief into a flood. Shame the West into greater action, however belated. You might then salvage something from the wreckage.

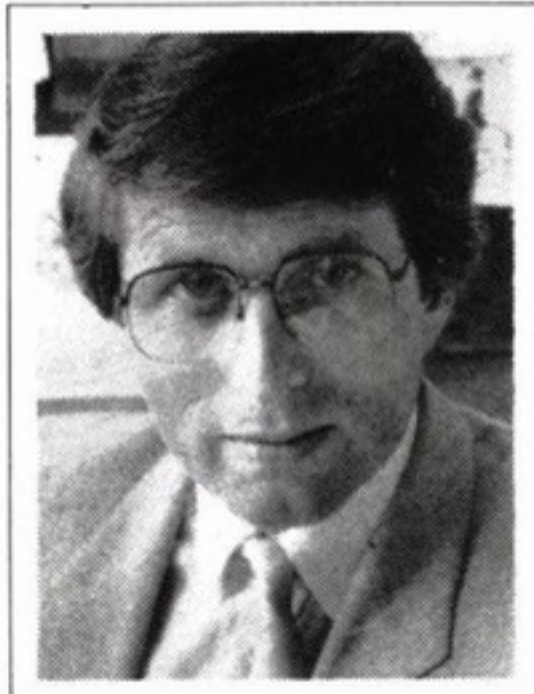
But I forget myself, Mr President, forgive me. There is no famine, and you have a bumper harvest. And to suppose that many thousands of children are about to die in another biblical famine is to indulge a fantasy or to ignore the will of God.

By the way, have you ever read that poem by one of our English poets, WH Auden? The famous one that ends: 'when he cried, the little children died in the streets'. It's all about a tyrant who doesn't care what happens to his people so long as he survives. Well worth reading.

Yours sincerely



Jonathan Dimbleby (BBC TV journalist)



## Of dignity and dying

**We expect the earth of aid workers in an emergency but would rather not hear them the rest of the time. Oxfam's Tony Vaux flies into the middle of famine in Ethiopia to cope with some awkward questions.**

It was a strange thing, that – to be offered a free bottle of champagne, just at the moment when the in-flight television news was showing an emaciated baby with a plastic tube in its nose and tiny limbs, wrinkled like leather.

I tensed up and placed the bottle as centrally as I could over the Oxfam heading on the papers in front of me. I wondered if the person next to me had noticed – or perhaps would write to *The Daily Telegraph* about the callous luxury life of aid workers. She took a fruit juice.

The news went on. People were interviewed. Terrible situation. Aid needed. CARE mentioned, or was it Save the Children? No Oxfam. Were we not there? I would have to check. The public expects Oxfam to be there among such scenes...

That's the way it is these days. Wherever there is a tragedy the expectation is that local people will be helpless, local government corrupt and the only chance will be aid directed through the charities. It's flattering, tempting – and also a very great responsibility. Is it fair?

The plane banked steeply for landing. Through the television-screen window the fields around Addis Ababa looked green and thriving. The VIPs from the front of the plane headed off to their destinations in limousines while the rest of us stood on the gangway bumping into each other's bags. Finally we walked over the tarmac

and were formally admitted to Ethiopia.

The first time I came to Addis, many years ago, I really did expect to see starvation on the streets. But of course there isn't any. It does not seem to occur in cities anywhere.

This time there were very few cars. Why not? *No fuel.*

Why no fuel? *The Russians have stopped sending it.*

Why? *They are not interested in Ethiopia any more.*

Why not? *The Russians have stopped promoting socialism.*

Why don't the Americans step in and help? *If there's no battle with the Russians why should they?*

It's the same with the food aid. If the West is really interested in helping – if it's a fight with the Russians or with Saddam Hussein – then the great might of their intervention will be felt. But who cares about Ethiopia? The world can manage without its coffee and Coptic churches. It produces no oil. So the issue of relief is left to the charities.

I asked my Ethiopian companion about the state of the famine-relief operation. 'It all depends,' he said, 'on the agreement between the Government and the rebels. If that holds then food can still move across the lines. If not there is nothing we can do.'

I prayed that the agreement would stay. I was responsible to the British public for



preventing starvation in Ethiopia. My success, it seemed, would depend on luck.

Many times we had urged that the issue of peace in Ethiopia should be high on the international agenda, but the only response seemed to be to withhold food aid until the fighting stopped, punishing the very victims we were trying to help.

'We are going to run out of food in a couple of weeks,' said my friend.

Six months earlier teams of agriculturalists had surveyed the famine areas, risking their lives to reach the most remote places in the war-torn highlands. No-one disputed their findings. By Christmas it was a fact that Ethiopia would starve unless the food ships started to move.

But now the docks were empty. We were borrowing food from one lot of needy people to give to others who were even more desperate. Spurred by public opinion the British Government was doing what it could within the parameters of one of Europe's lowest aid budgets, but most food aid – more than two thirds – comes from the EC and the US.

One factor was the Gulf War. Officials were busy with other things. Another seemed to be a persistent gut feeling that until the children were photographed dying and shown on television the predictions of the experts were not quite credible. So there was delay. The charities themselves felt reluctant to appeal to the public unless there was already an awareness that the situation was serious.

In the end so much of the response depends on the public, on you rather than me. Yet when finally the dying babies are projected into the drawing rooms the blame falls on the charities. We are asked what we did with all Bob Geldof's millions, what our overhead costs are (a free bottle of champagne?) and why we are not properly 'co-ordinated'.

We sat down to beer and sandwiches under the giant eucalyptus trees. The air was crystal clear and the bougainvillea tumbled in a royal robe of purple. I still felt guilty.

What could we do? Lobby for more food back in England?

'Yes, but go and have a look first,' said my friend. 'Go to Gambella. There's only enough food for two weeks there, and we don't know when any more is coming.'

The next day I drove, and the day after that. It was good to feel that there was some action. At last I had nearly reached the border with Sudan. It was one of the refugee camps where starvation and death were frequently reported.

The first impression was rather different: rows of shops set up by entrepreneurs who had heard of sales opportunities in the camps. It's a sort of secret, but refugees do normally sell part of their ration as they find it difficult to conduct their entire lives on just two food commodities. This attracts shopkeepers but the public are not really supposed to know.

Cheeky children were rushing about.

Women proceeded in stately rows through the crowd to the riverbank to wash their clothes. We walked past all that and went to the Therapeutic Feeding Centre run by foreign nurses. There, of course, were the leather-limbed babies and plastic nose-tubes, the terrible sight I had first seen during the last great Ethiopian famine in 1984. Were we back here again so soon? I took some photos – I felt awkward about doing it, but thought the pictures might help bring more food to the camp.

On the way back we saw a ring of exquisitely thatched huts, much bigger than the simple tukuls in which the refugees lived. I peered through the doorway of one of them into the darkness. A man was teaching English to a group of refugees. Each one had a slate and some tattered exercise books.

'John,' said the teacher. 'Can you spell that?' He tried. Other eager hands shot up.

At the end the teacher turned to me politely. I stammered a few words about just happening to be walking by, about how impressive it was to see the school. Their education would be useful when they returned to Sudan.

'That is what we want,' he said. 'That is the only solution for us.'

'Will that happen?'

'If the war ends.'

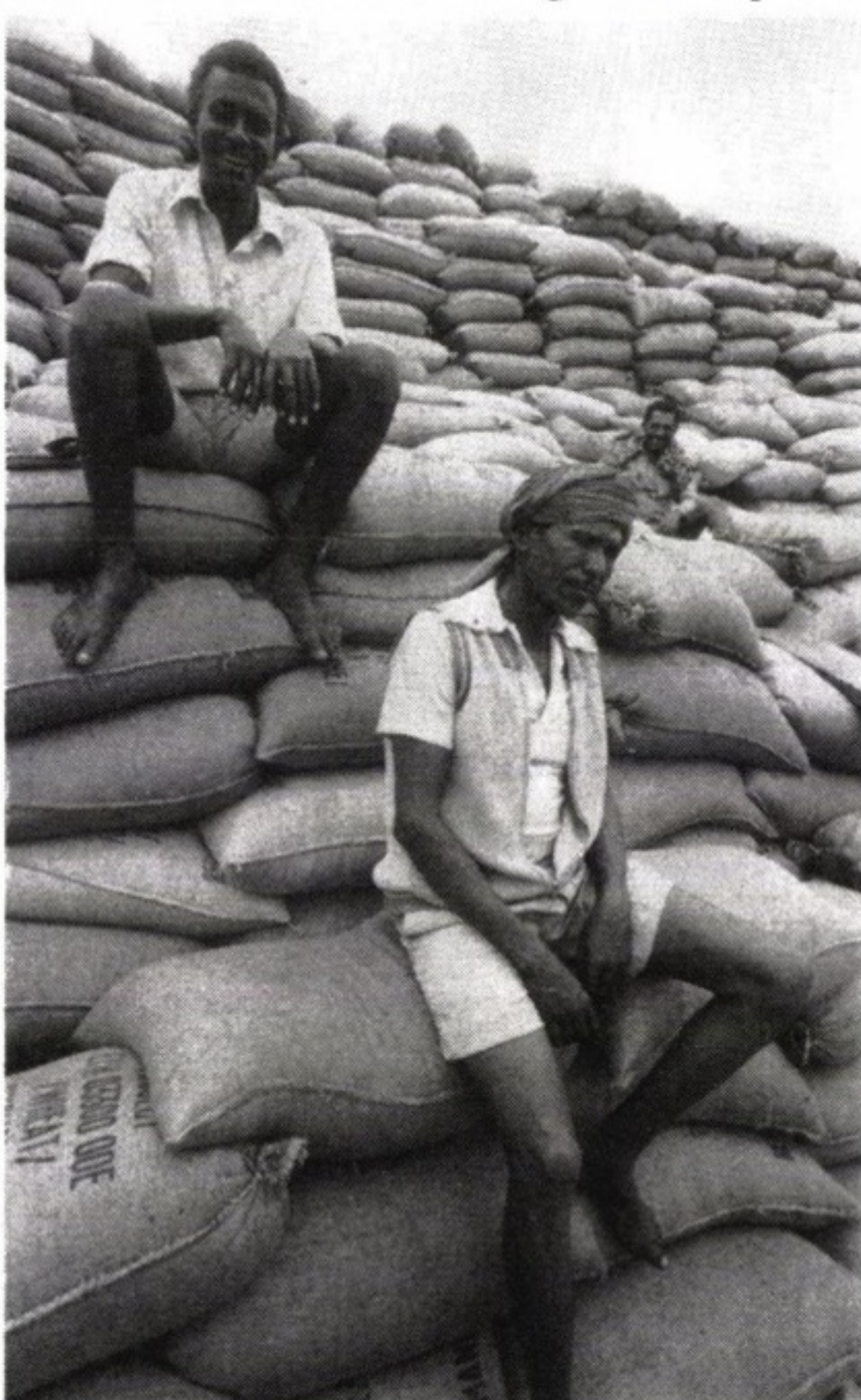
'Will it end?'

'If what causes the war ceases to be.'

'And what is that?'

He eyed me for a moment and then turned to the class. This time he spoke in his own language. Soon a crop of hands sprung up, less eagerly perhaps.

'The North against the South,' he said, writing on the blackboard. 'Lack of education in the South. Dispute over oil reserves. Trading competition. Foreign involvement. Cattle raiding. Old disputes.'



Food aid aplenty – but in 1988, not 1991.

Colonial boundaries. Religion.' The list went on until there was no more room on the board. I began to feel rather helpless.

'Can I help you?' came a calm voice in English from behind me. I turned and saw a dignified lady in neat Western clothes.

'Are you the head teacher?' I asked.

'Yes. Would you like to see the school?'

Of course I had already done so, without her permission. Clearly this was a place where foreign visitors should observe the norms of civilization. Quite true – I would not have walked into a classroom in Chelmsford or Christchurch without first explaining my purpose to the Head.

'No, we must rush.' Where to? Why? 'Do you get any outside support for this school?' I asked, for our main business is always to know what foreigners are doing.

'No. It is voluntary. The teachers give their time. The parents built the school and find money for the books...'

I bowed and left. No champagne and in-flight entertainment for this lady.

So there I was. The Russians had stopped giving fuel, so even the trucks had stopped. The Americans were not giving food because the Russians were no longer interested in Ethiopia – or maybe because they were too busy with the Gulf War. These refugees were not in the news anywhere because they were not dying yet. They wanted to go home but there were problems in the way, beyond their scope and mine. Meanwhile they were getting on and educating themselves in preparation for better days.

Would anyone give them food out of admiration? Perhaps, if there was time to explain everything. But there would not be time. Food aid officials are like corks bobbing on the sea. You catch them when you see them. Food would run out in a few weeks unless something was done.

The pictures from the Therapeutic Feeding Centre would be a better way to get help. Better for what, ultimately? To save others from the embarrassment of people dying in their thousands on television while they drink champagne?

On the flight back home I made notes to lobby for more food and to see what Oxfam could do about the underlying causes. I drank fruit juice only and watched no films. I wanted to keep in my mind's eye for as long as possible the image of that dignified teacher and the eager young Sudanese refugees, thrusting up their hands in the darkness. That image made me feel hopeful, full of the will to do something to help them.

The image of the dying child just left me feeling guilty and impotent. And if it does that to someone in my job then what on earth does it do to you? □

**Tony Vaux has worked in Oxfam UK's Emergencies Unit for the last seven years. Since his visit the fall of the Ethiopian Government has given long-term hope – but the famine continues.**



## THE DEATH TOLL

A chronology of the worst disasters of the last two decades, those with a death toll of 5,000 or higher. The list begins and ends with Bangladesh's two most terrible cyclones.<sup>1</sup>

| Date | Location       | Death toll | Disaster type         |
|------|----------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 1970 | Bangladesh     | 300,000    | Cyclone               |
|      | Peru           | 66,794     | Earthquake/landslide  |
|      | China          | 10,000     | Earthquake            |
| 1971 | Bangladesh     | 200,000    | Civil strife          |
|      | India          | 9,658      | Cyclone               |
|      | India          | 5,000      | Epidemic (cholera)    |
| 1972 | Burundi        | 100,000    | Civil strife          |
|      | Nicaragua      | 10,000     | Earthquake            |
|      | Iran           | 5,057      | Earthquake            |
| 1973 | Sahel          | 100,000    | Drought               |
|      | Ethiopia       | 100,000    | Drought               |
| 1974 | Bangladesh     | 28,700     | Flood                 |
|      | Somalia        | 19,000     | Drought               |
|      | Honduras       | 8,000      | Hurricane             |
| 1975 | Cambodia       | 1,000,000  | Genocide (1975-8)     |
|      | Lebanon        | 40,000     | Civil strife          |
|      | Angola         | 10,000     | Civil strife          |
| 1976 | China          | 242,000    | Earthquake            |
|      | Guatemala      | 23,000     | Earthquake            |
|      | Philippines    | 6,000      | Earthquake            |
| 1977 | India          | 14,204     | Cyclone               |
| 1978 | Iran           | 15,000     | Earthquake            |
|      | Bangladesh     | 6,150      | Civil strife          |
| 1979 | Nicaragua      | 30,000     | Civil strife          |
| 1980 | El Salvador    | 20,000     | Civil strife          |
| 1982 | Lebanon        | 19,800     | Civil strife          |
| 1983 | Sudan          | 250,000    | Civil strife (1983-8) |
| 1984 | Ethiopia       | 300,000    | Drought (1984-5)      |
| 1985 | Mozambique     | 100,000    | Drought/civil strife  |
|      | Colombia       | 21,800     | Volcano               |
|      | Bangladesh     | 10,000     | Cyclone               |
|      | Mexico         | 8,776      | Earthquake            |
|      | Mozambique     | 80,000     | Civil strife          |
| 1986 | Mozambique     | 100,000    | Civil strife          |
| 1988 | Armenia        | 25,000     | Earthquake            |
|      | Somalia        | 15,000     | Civil strife          |
|      | Burundi        | 5,000      | Civil strife          |
| 1989 | Somalia        | 35,000     | Civil strife          |
|      | Ethiopia       | 7,385      | Epidemic (meningitis) |
| 1990 | Iran           | 40,000     | Earthquake            |
|      | Liberia        | 10,000     | Civil strife          |
| 1991 | Iraq           | ?          | Civil strife          |
|      | Latin America  | ?          | Epidemic (cholera)    |
|      | Horn of Africa | ?          | Drought               |
|      | Bangladesh     | 140,000    | Cyclone               |

## SPIRALLING DISASTERS

The number of disasters reported worldwide is multiplying with every decade<sup>2</sup>



While the trend is decidedly upward, the 1980s figures are inflated by the new openness of the Soviet Union and China in reporting disasters. While China reported only three disasters during the 1960s (the time of the Cultural Revolution) and nine in the 1970s, it reported 85 in the 1980s, including everything from boat accidents on the Yangtse River to the typhoon flooding that killed 2,000 people in 1989. Similarly the Soviets reported just one disaster in the 1960s and three in the 1970s, but 31 in the 1980s, including the earthquake in Armenia which killed 25,000 people in 1988.

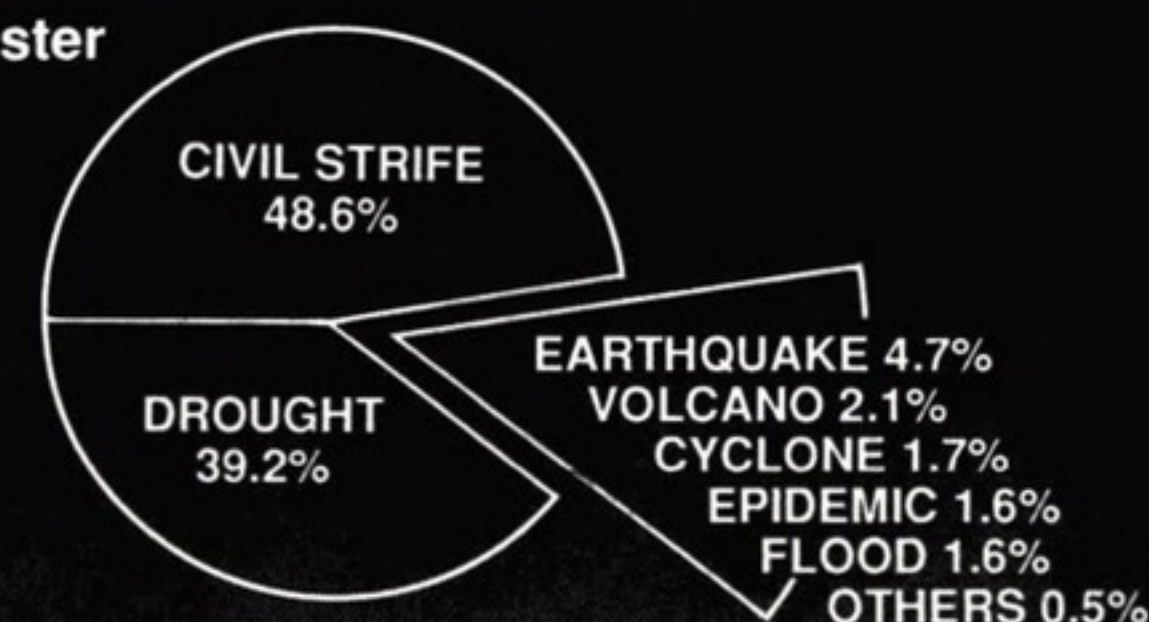
## DEADLY DECADES

Fewer people died in disasters during the 1980s than in the two preceding decades, largely because of the Biafran war of secession in Nigeria (1967) and the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia (1975-1978), which each killed one million people.

|                                   |       |           |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Worldwide deaths in               | 1960s | 1,344,404 |
| disasters, 1960-1989 <sup>2</sup> | 1970s | 2,426,948 |
|                                   | 1980s | 1,165,002 |

Biafra and Cambodia were extreme examples but civil strife was also the main killer in the 1980s, with drought-related famine close behind. The other types of disaster cause far fewer deaths.

Biggest killers by disaster type, 1980-1989<sup>1</sup>

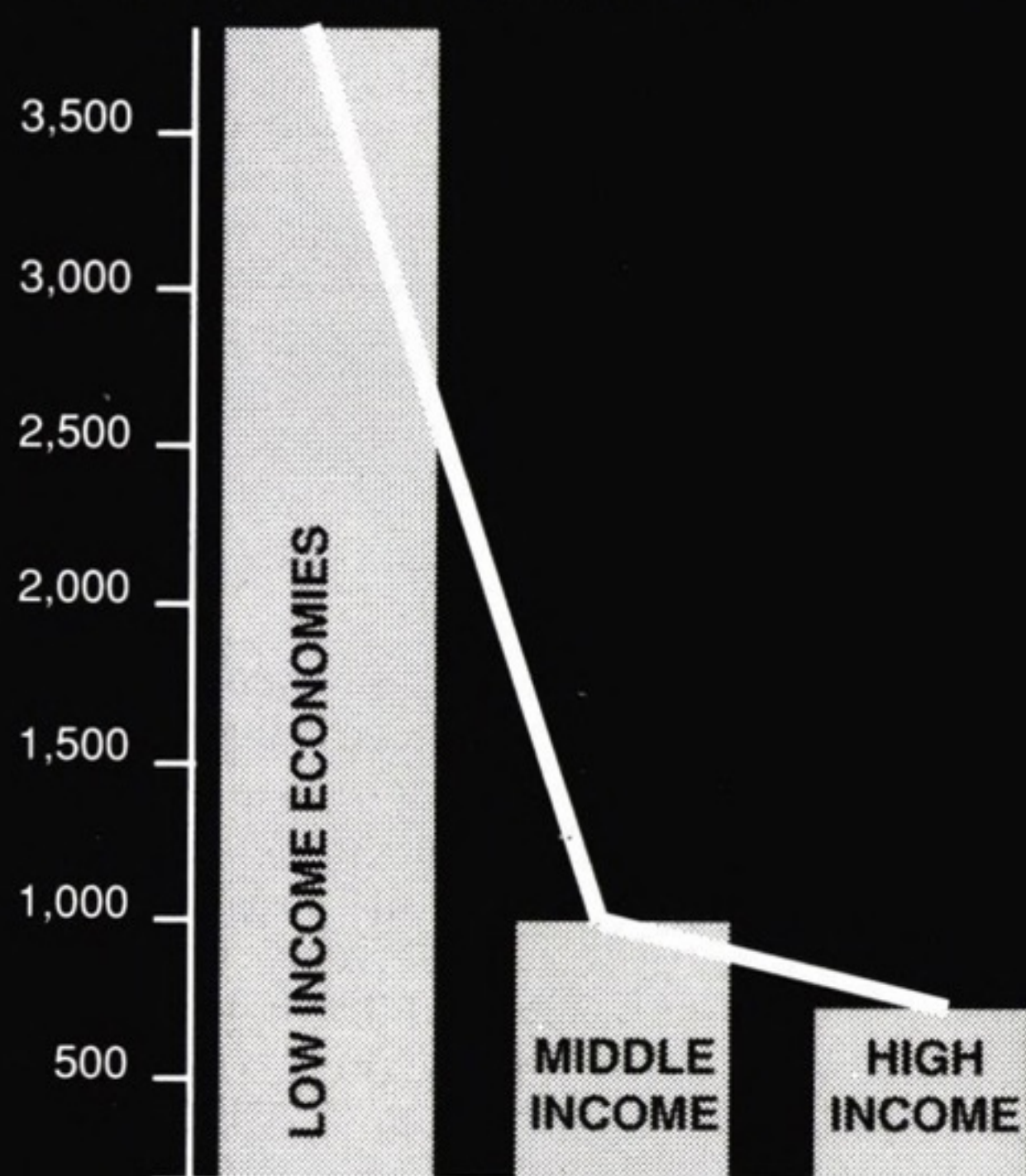


Cast out in the wilderness: refugees from the famine in Tigray approach Kassala, Sudan, in 1985.



## PRECIPICE FOR THE POOR

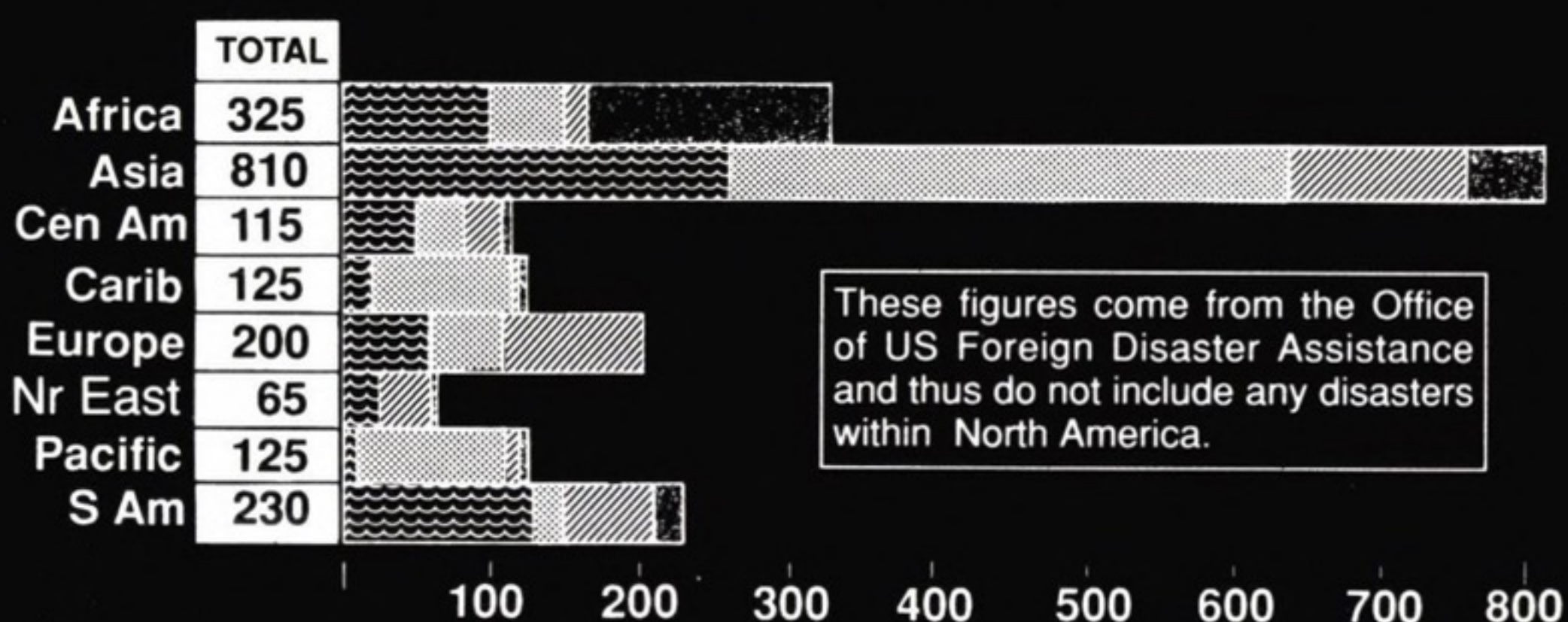
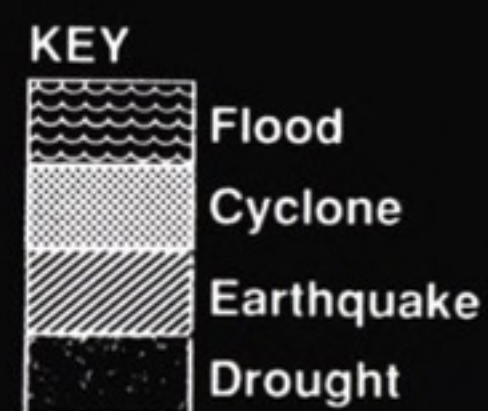
Number of people killed per disaster event, rich and poor worlds, 1960-1981.<sup>3</sup>



Each disaster causes many more deaths in poor countries than in rich ones. Wealthy countries will never suffer from famine, for example, and are much less likely to face civil war. But also low-income economies contain many more people living in the poverty and marginal conditions that make them vulnerable.

## THIRD WORLD BURDEN

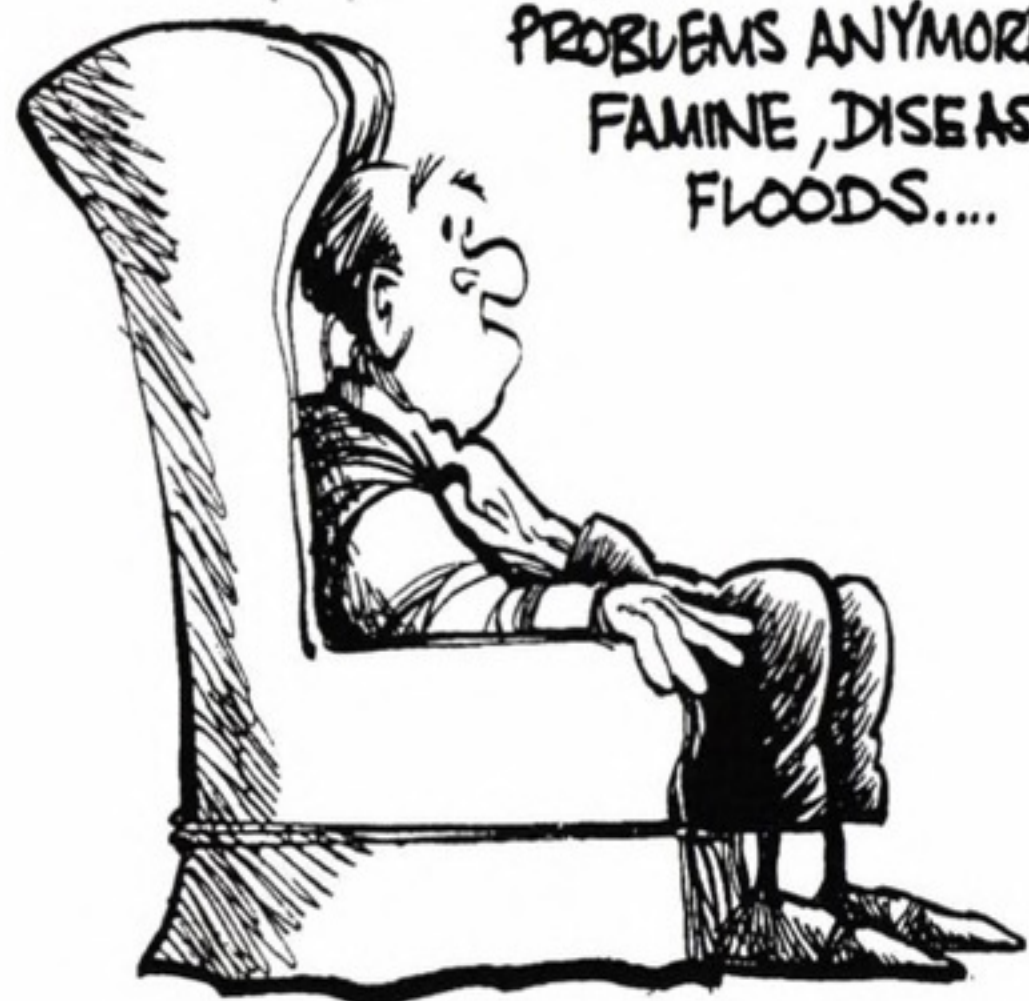
Poor countries are much more prone to disasters than rich ones. India suffered most disasters in the 1980s (99), followed by China (82), Indonesia (73), Bangladesh (61) and the Philippines (56). As this list implies, Asia is the region by far the most afflicted by natural disasters.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Extracted from *Disaster History - Significant data on major disasters worldwide*, Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance, Washington 1990. <sup>2</sup> Calculated from the country tables of the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance. They therefore do not include any disasters within the US. <sup>3</sup> *Prevention Better Than Cure*, Swedish Red Cross 1984.



IT'S HARD TO GET PEOPLE  
INTERESTED IN THIRD WORLD  
PROBLEMS ANYMORE..  
FAMINE, DISEASE,  
FLOODS....



I THINK IT'S CALLED APPEAL  
FATIGUE....



AND ONE THING IS FOR SURE;  
IF THEY IGNORE THE PROBLEMS  
THEY WILL SURELY GO AWAY...



## The myth of 'compassion fatigue'

Anuradha Vittachi finds herself in conversation with a voice in her head.

**O**H no, not another disaster, not before breakfast. Switch off the news, I haven't got my defences up yet.

You don't imagine you're suffering from 'compassion fatigue', I hope.

I might be. Everyone else seems to be.

Nonsense. Compassion doesn't make you feel tired. It enlivens you. Remember when you saw that woman knocked into the air by the drunk driver and thwack down onto the car bonnet.

What about it?

I remember your heart pounding, speeding all that extra oxygen into your legs so they could race over to her. Your adrenaline level was rocketing. And your mind side-stepped what you were preoccupied with at the time – a cheese and tomato sandwich, as I recall – and started whirling around, working out the fastest way to get her an ambulance. Didn't seem like fatigue to me.

I don't remember the sandwich. Anyway, that was just once. Compassion fatigue is what comes over you when you keep coming across disasters. If I saw it happen every time I stepped out in the street...

Well, obviously! If you kept solemnly racing to the phone for ambulances

because you saw women being thrown into the air every time you opened your front door, you'd need the ambulance. Complete with people in white coats.

Well, it's true. If there were that many accidents I would try to think up a better response than just phoning for an ambulance.

Exactly. It wouldn't be 'compassion fatigue' that stopped you phoning. It'd be common sense. You would have seen the need to put in a bit of long-term thinking to solve the problem, instead of just operating a quick fix.

What is this elaborate metaphor of yours supposed to teach me?

That you have begun to realize that your old remedy for coping with global tragedies – sending a few dollars to charity every month or so – simply isn't enough on its own. It's a calling-the-ambulance response. Your despair at the pointlessness of sending more dribs and drabs of money means that you have finally recognized it's time for a re-assessment, a deeper diagnosis.

I suppose it would be rather neurotic to go on reacting in an old way after I have recognized it's no longer effective.

It's a *definition* of behaving neurotically. Or if it isn't, it should be.

So what would a more useful response

be, when I am facing so many terrible disasters?

How should I know? There isn't a ready-made, generally recognized response to this scale of problem.

But I can't sort out by myself all the factors that come together to make a disaster, like international politicking or macro-economics or global weather variables. It's all too much to cope with. Isn't there anyone who has sorted out how to cope with these huge global dilemmas?

Not really. On the whole religious leaders and politicians are too sectarian to care that much about people outside their constituencies; journalists rarely bother to investigate what is really going on. International charity workers are probably the best placed to know what kinds of structural changes need to take place but they are expressly forbidden to 'meddle in politics'.

So charities are forbidden to help enough; the government doesn't care enough; ordinary citizens don't know enough...

No wonder people hesitate and despair.

Perhaps I should rename 'compassion fatigue' something like 'misery-at-realizing-the-ineffectiveness-of-our-range-of-responses fatigue'.

Not quite as catchy, is it?

'Powerlessness fatigue'? 'Hopelessness fatigue'?

Still not catchy, but they do pinpoint the problem. It's not feeling compassionate that you get tired from, it's feeling helpless. People don't like that.

No more do I. Floundering in bog and fog without any clear path out of it: it's a real recipe for depression.

And depression is more fatiguing than anything else.

Odd, isn't it? When I'm depressed I do much less work and I fall asleep a lot – so why should I be more tired?

Because, even though you're not using up your energy to work, you are consuming it doing something else: pushing those dark, painful feelings like hopelessness down below the level of consciousness, keeping them hidden and denied.

Like pressing down a jack-in-the-box lid with your thumb. Hey I'm *depressing* the lid – I never thought of the word so literally before.

Metaphors are wonderfully literal.

Oh, please, paradoxes before breakfast are too much.

Sorry.

So I am left to work out a response to these global tragedies by myself – and then hopelessness and depression drain off my creative energies before I've begun to think.

It would help if you didn't try for some global panacea, but you could figure out some useful small-scale responses.



You mean I don't have to solve everything all by myself!

It may not really be your ignorance that is stopping you – though that is considerable...

Thanks a lot.

It sounds more like 'helplessness fatigue' because you think you have to solve it all. Gautama Buddha couldn't solve it all, Jesus Christ couldn't, Mahatma Gandhi couldn't, but you feel bad because you can't.

Well, okay. But even if I can't do everything, I need to feel confidence that I can make some useful contribution, even if it is small. That's the way I get my strength and hope back.

You are such an achievement addict! If you don't get your daily fix of feeling you've 'made a difference', you're miserable.

It's not just me, it's the whole culture I live in. It's so end-gaining, goal-oriented; so heroic, macho, performance-conscious.

I assume that, by this appalling jargon, you mean you have become dependent on seeing quick and measurable results for your efforts.

Well, the quality of *being* doesn't count in present-day society, even though all the greatest sages and wisest prophets were preaching about being: only *doing* counts. You can't be a be-er. The word doesn't even exist. You can only be a do-er – or a don't-er.

But you seem to have bought the culture's view that you have to be either a total fixer or a total failure.

I suppose that's right. If I think I'm not going to be able to fix something, like a huge crisis on the other side of the world, I imagine I'll be better off avoiding it altogether. So I switch off the news.

The combination of high drama and helplessness isn't easy to live with, I admit. And total denial is the simplest method of avoidance. A subtler method is participating in an *illusion* of useful

action.

You mean like green consumerism? People's fears about global warming are soaring so companies calm them down by offering them lists of so-called 'environment-friendly' products to buy. Then people could carry on consuming happily in the illusion that they were actively healing the planet.

Living in a consumerist trance. And what about husbands who promise to be faithful 'next time'? Their wives believe them because they want to – may need to – go on believing in the illusion of marital fidelity, stay in the trance. Just as we have gone on buying the illusion that drips of charity here and there can help, until it has been finally borne in upon us by the sheer scale of the disasters that charity is just not enough. Then the veil of illusion is torn, and we see reality for a moment, that charity has to give way to justice.

But if justice is your answer it won't

## Beat the quake, man

**Rich world disasters are not so disastrous. John Enbom reports from earthquake-aware San Francisco.**

**A**PRIL in California is earthquake-preparedness month. Around two million people statewide scramble under desks and tables at 10.10 in the morning on the first of the month in a special 'Duck, Cover and Hold Drill' to kick things off. The rest of April is set aside for various theme weeks – business awareness, home awareness, school awareness etc. The month's mascot, a groovy sunglasses-wearing cartoon creature in the shape of California, holds aloft a wrench and advises 'Beat the quake! Bolt it, brace it, fasten it down!'

Such is life in the San Francisco Bay Area, where over five million people live and work astride two very active fault lines. Everyone knows the quakes are out there somewhere since the US Geological Survey has mapped everything extensively and can forecast probabilities with reasonable accuracy. The question is, what to do about it? The philosophy which has shaped the state's thinking lies along the lines of preventative dentistry – damage is most easily fixed before it occurs.

Richard Eisner is the director of the Bay Area Regional Earthquake Preparedness Project (BAREPP), a branch of California's Office of Emergency Services (OES). In his Oakland offices, surrounded by framed photographs of earthquake damage, he and his staff prepare for quakes yet to come.

'Outside this country we find tremendous life loss where construction is done with indigenous materials and has not been professionalized,' he says. 'But here we had seismic codes, a whole rash of them, utilized statewide, after the Long Beach quake in 1933.' As a result of these codes all public schools, hospitals, fire and police stations – those structures designated as 'essential services' – must pass a state design review and be constructed to withstand a quake. Additional codes since the 1971 San Fernando quake have set minimum standards for almost every type of building.

Along with concerns for structural integrity, BAREPP's preparedness measures include a large dose of educational activities – hence the cartoon humanoid with the wrench. 'For a number of years now our emphasis has been on developing skills,' says Eisner, 'getting people to be able to fend for themselves for those magic 72 hours. We have been telling people not to depend on the Government for anything. For that period of time we are basically an underdeveloped country.'

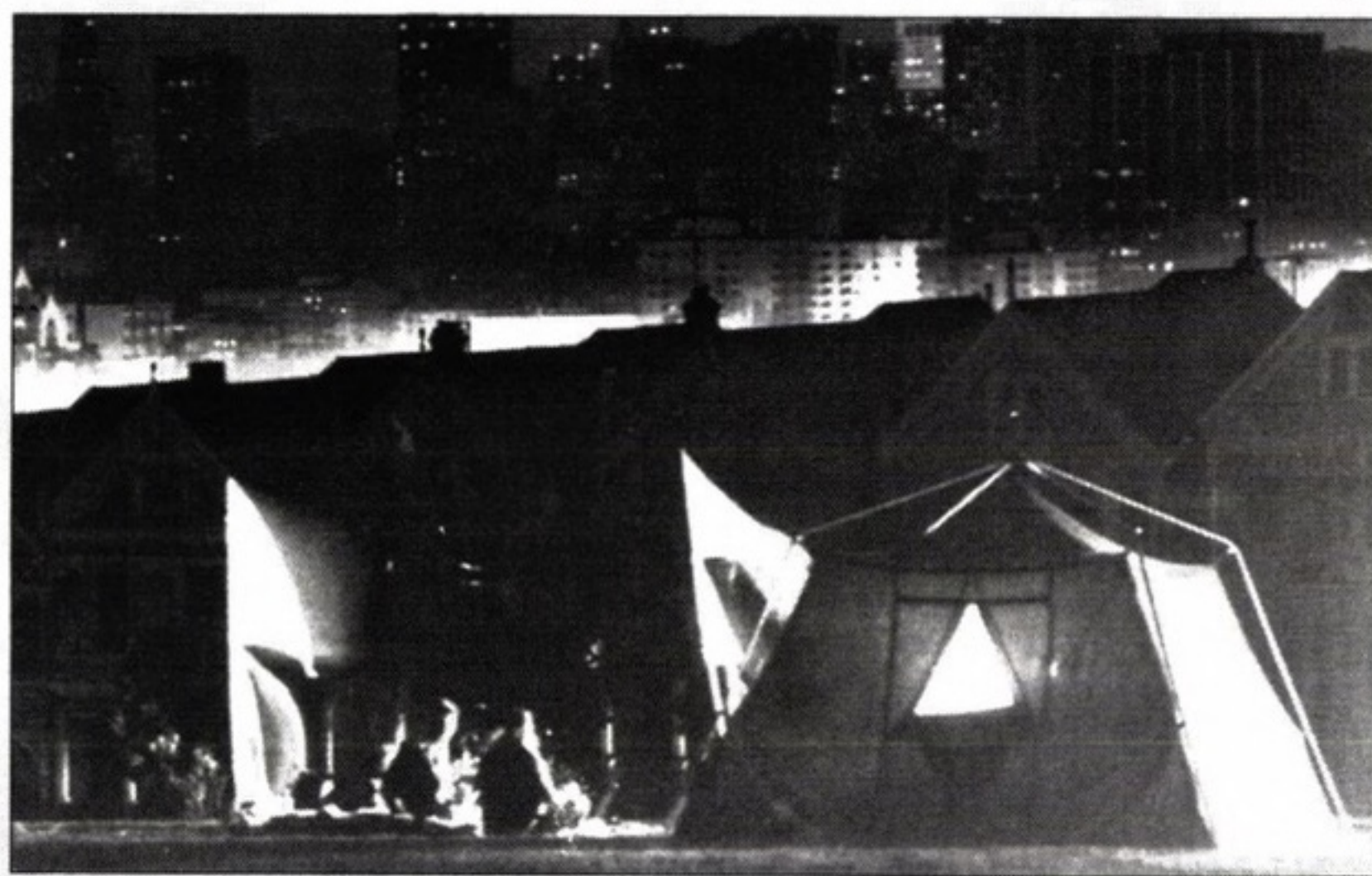
Of course the real test of any plan is the actual event you've been planning for. The Loma Prieta quake, 7.1 on the Richter scale, which struck south of the Bay Area on 17 October 1989, had been much planned for. A survey of the area in 1988 had determined there was a high probability of a quake within 30 years and had indicated, with a high degree of accuracy, which areas would be most vulnerable to damage due to ground movement. A simulated earthquake drill had been conducted three months before.

Reaction to the quake was swift. At undamaged Candlestick Park, where the third game of baseball's World Series had been getting under way, no-one was really sure what had happened, although one sports

announcer dug out the phone book and started reading the earthquake instructions over the radio. Over in the state capitol the OES people went scrambling for their State Operations Center, where they began putting together a picture of what had happened and figuring out who needed what. The phones were working so faxes were soon flying, sending out press releases and co-ordinating resources. With few exceptions, local police and firefighting rescue teams were able to handle emergencies in their own areas without need of assistance since their infrastructures were intact and the roads and hospitals usable. The 27,000-strong National Guard was on alert within 20 minutes and soon on its way to provide shelter, food and water to those in cut-off areas.

The final Loma Prieta statistics – 62 dead, 3,757 injured and six billion dollars in damage – pale in comparison to the havoc wreaked by the earthquake in Armenia the year before, which was of similar magnitude but which killed 25,000 people.

But no-one in the California earthquake game is satisfied. All eyes are now turned toward The Next One which, according to most counts, will be A Big One. 'We are going to have some real problems,' says



*Camping out after the earthquake – but the skyscrapers stand.*

Eisner, changing his tone of voice as they all do when discussing The Next One. 'The next event will probably be worst case.' To prepare for this eventuality, the earthquake people are doing all they can to squeeze lessons out of Loma Prieta.

As is common for government agencies, however, OES and BAREPP's vision far outstrips their resources. With California deep in debt, few of the ideas inspired by Loma Prieta will see the light of day soon. Eisner, who was hoping for a new satellite emergency communications system, must settle instead for a 30-per-cent budget cut. Unreinforced structures known to be dangerous are not being strengthened. The resources available for The Next One could very well be the same as they were in 1989. And that rubs many Californians, used to upgrading after each quake, up the wrong way.

**John Enbom works for the Pacific News Service in San Francisco.**

Photo: Blake Sell/Popperfoto/Reuter



get very far: we don't like the idea of having to make serious sacrifices. And we won't: it's not human nature to give up privileges.

So you are framing the only two choices available to us as avoidance or selfishness.

I suppose so.

In other words, a refusal to face the problem – or a refusal to face the solution! If that's the case, you really are admitting that 'compassion fatigue' doesn't exist – because compassion doesn't exist.

Well, I think it does exist – it's just hard to get at.

It's hidden behind the barrier of our fears. I know what you most fear.

Loneliness and destitution.

Which is why you get so upset when you see people who have nothing and belong nowhere. You don't really see the other person at all – all you see is your fear. 'There but for the grace of God go I,' you mutter as you hurry away.

Actually, this reminds me of a strange experience I once had. It sounds very corny...

Spit it out!

It was a bit like being in a dream, though I was wide awake. I felt like I had this black mess of pain and misery inside my stomach, which I had to 'vomit' out. I remember heaving and retching, and though nothing actually came out, I could 'see' in my mind's eye the black mess at my feet – and I knew that it was everything I most feared. I also knew I could choose to avoid it again, by running away from it or swallowing it down out of sight. Or step right into it. Which I did. And then I saw these destitute people all around me. I was surrounded by them! But suddenly, instead of feeling terrified and claustrophobic, I felt completely one of them. It was wonderfully peaceful and joyful, like I belonged with them all.

Your brothers and sisters.

Well, actually, yes. I wonder if that's why nuns and priests take the vows of poverty and are called 'Sisters' and 'Brothers': perhaps it is so they have this experience of being the sisters and brothers of the poor...

'Com-*passion*' means *being with the suffering* – not disliking them and scattering largesse at arms' length to make the sufferers and their problem go away. The proper meaning of 'charity' is love – and what love does is connect. You should try connecting with your compassion next time you see someone or something painful on the breakfast news.

It might even stop me suffering from 'compassion fatigue'...

Anuradha Vittachi is a former NI co-editor and author of *Stolen Childhood: In Search of the Rights of the Child* (Polity Press).

# My daddy's dead

**Modern Latin America has suffered many ills, but cholera has not been among them – until now. Suzanne Timmons reports from the shanty towns of Peru where the bacteria gained a foothold – and relays a message to the politicians.**

**F**OUR-YEAR-OLD Percy Ripas kicks his bare feet in the sand floor of his mother's one-room straw shack and watches his older brother spoon sugar into six tin coffee cups. The coffee, mixed with water stored in a tub on the floor amidst dirty pots, pans, plates and yesterday's leftovers of beans and rice, is the Ripas family's only breakfast.

Clutching a grimy paperback dictionary as if it were a teddy bear, Percy looks up as his mother, Maria, tells about the nights his father spent in the local cholera ward with Percy's older brother Freddy. Freddy recovered but his father, a 35-year-old cobbler, went down with cholera and died shortly after walking for 45 minutes to the nearest hospital for treatment.

'My daddy's dead,' Percy says simply, opening his brown eyes wide and chewing on his lower lip. Now Percy, as well as his eight-month-old brother, has come down with the tell-tale signs of cholera: vomiting, diarrhoea and cramps.

It's no surprise that the Ripas family, as well as thousands of other poor families in the shanty towns sprawled across the hills around Lima, are victims of Peru's cholera epidemic. Nearly 1,500 people have died and around 200,000 have been stricken with cholera since the epidemic began. The bacteria – spread mainly via contaminated water – strikes and flourishes in areas that lack running water and proper sanitation services. It will be years before the Ripas family has either.

The Ripases set up their straw shack along with 600 other families one night last year, squatting on an empty lot earmarked for an open-air market in the middle of an older shanty town. The dirt lanes between the shacks – reeking of urine and excrement – and a smouldering garbage dump only metres from the houses, serve as the settlement's only toilets.

They beg for bucketsful of water from their longer-established neighbors across the road, most of whom have scraped together enough money to replace their straw huts with brick houses. Some of these buy water from trucks and store it in outdoor cement tanks. Others, like Maria Ripas' aunt, Domitila Panuera, have running water. But even then the taps are often dry for weeks at a time.

The cholera outbreak, the first to strike Latin America in over 100 years, was detected in late January in the port town of Chimote, 400 kilometres north of Lima. Epidemiologists say that it most likely was brought to Peru on a ship from Asia.

The epidemic swept quickly to other coastal cities and within weeks had spread to the most remote areas of the Andes and the Peruvian Amazon. At the end of March, when the epidemic peaked, around 1,000 people a day were falling victim to cholera.

'It's a reflection of poverty,' said Dr Hugo Contreras at the Ciudad de Dios health centre, one of four medical posts that serve several million shanty-town dwellers to Lima's south. 'Cholera patients almost always come from shanty towns.'

It is not only the lack of running water and sewage facilities that makes the poor a target for cholera.

Many barely have enough money for kerosene to cook every day, much less to buy the extra fuel to boil drinking water for ten minutes, as the Ministry of Health recommends. And in the Ripas household, the one-burner kerosene stove is nearly ready for the junkyard. 'The kids have to get up at dawn every day to fire it,' Maria said. 'It's hard to keep the water boiling for so long.'

Now health officials say that the epidemic, in Lima at least, is under control. But doctors caution that the slump in the number of cases does not necessarily mean that cholera has been beaten. The bacteria tend to lie dormant with the drop in temperatures during winter, which in the southern hemisphere begins in early May.

Meanwhile the epidemic is still raging in the jungle, where the year-round heat is providing ideal conditions for the epidemic to spread. In the jungle, as well as in the Andes, many people live two or three days' journey by boat or by foot from health posts where they can be treated with life-saving rehydrating salts. In four jungle provinces the number of cases quadrupled within a matter of days in mid-May.

The Peruvian Government's frontline attack on the cholera epidemic with economic aid, supplies for medical posts and massive distribution of health rules, has helped keep the mortality rate of the epidemic so far to 0.7 per cent of those with-



**Cholera  
Bacillus**



the illness – one of the lowest rates in the history of worldwide cholera epidemics.

The Government is footing the bill for all cholera patients. Peru has received millions of dollars in medical aid from over 60 countries since the epidemic began and most hospitals have had enough supplies to treat all cholera patients. 'The problem at most hospitals wasn't having enough medicine but enough beds for the number of patients,' Dr Contreras said. 'I was at a very remote village in the highlands that is six hours from the nearest town, and even the smallest medical post there had medicines for cholera,' he said.

But doctors at the same time severely criticize the Government for refusing to clear the streets of street vendors who prepare everything from hand-squeezed orange juice to *cebiche*, a dish of raw fish marinated in onion and lime juice. Many cholera patients say they came down with cholera after eating food from the street.

To make matters worse, President Alberto Fujimori and the Minister of Fisheries, Felix Canal, in mid-March launched what the local press called 'the *cebiche* war' against Health Minister Carlos Vidal. Both Fujimori and Canal refused to heed warnings by the Health Ministry to avoid eating raw fish. They appeared on national television several times eating *cebiche*. Vidal resigned – and the number of cholera victims increased by over 30 per cent in just two weeks.

Health Ministry officials, as well as the World Health Organization, say dishes prepared with raw, shore-hugging fish and shellfish are cholera carriers. Raw sewage is dumped in the ocean throughout Peru, and health officials say that fish, although they do not die from cholera, pass the bacteria on to humans if they are not cooked.

But *cebiche* prepared by street vendors is one of the cheapest meals available. 'Cebiche sold right outside this centre costs the same as a bus fare,' said Dr Contreras. 'No-one can make a lunch at home for that little.'

The World Health Organization (WHO), which says cholera is already endemic in Peru, is concerned that the bacteria will be around in Latin America for many years to come. Outbreaks have been detected in Ecuador, Colombia, Chile and Brazil, and authorities in Venezuela are gearing up to battle the disease when it crosses their borders, which they say is 'inevitable'.

The Panamerican Health Organization says that 40,000 people in all of Latin America are in danger of dying from

cholera and six million are likely to fall ill by 1995.

'It will always be people without water and sewage facilities who will be affected with cholera,' a WHO spokesperson in Lima said. The WHO estimates that in Latin America and the Caribbean only 40 per cent of the population has clean water and 30 per cent has effective sanitation.

In Peru, health specialists and social workers agree that improving living conditions for the poor majority is the only way to beat cholera for good. 'The educational part (of the anti-cholera campaign) is good, but the Government still hasn't done anything about sanitation. What it needs to do is give water and sewage facilities to those that don't have any,' said Fanny Cotos, a social worker with the Anglican Church who is helping out the Ripas family.

WHO officials also say that only longer-term solutions will work. They say that Peru must spend \$300 million a year over the next 10 years to provide clean water and sewage services to 80 per cent of the 28 million people who will live in Peru by the year 2000.

But it won't be easy. The country is facing one of the worst economic crises in its history.

1452A : Tue Apr 30 21:57



**epa**  
T8705-30APR91-LETICIA, Colombia: A Peruvian family arrives 30 Apr in this small Colombian port town on the Solimoes River at the border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil to visit the local hospital for a medical checkup. Officials report that at least a dozen cholera cases have been detected in this border region.  
AFP/ Antonio SCORZA/as/oc  
(c)

**LIM04:CHOLERA:LIMA, 22FEB91-** Peruvian children search for reusable objects on a pile of garbage at a working class neighborhood of the capital February 22. Peru's deadly cholera epidemic is spreading across the country through contaminated water and food. The epidemic, which has killed 120 people in three weeks, is the worst in Latin America since cholera was largely eliminated from the region in the 1890s.  
aw/str-Gustavo Ercole  
REUTER

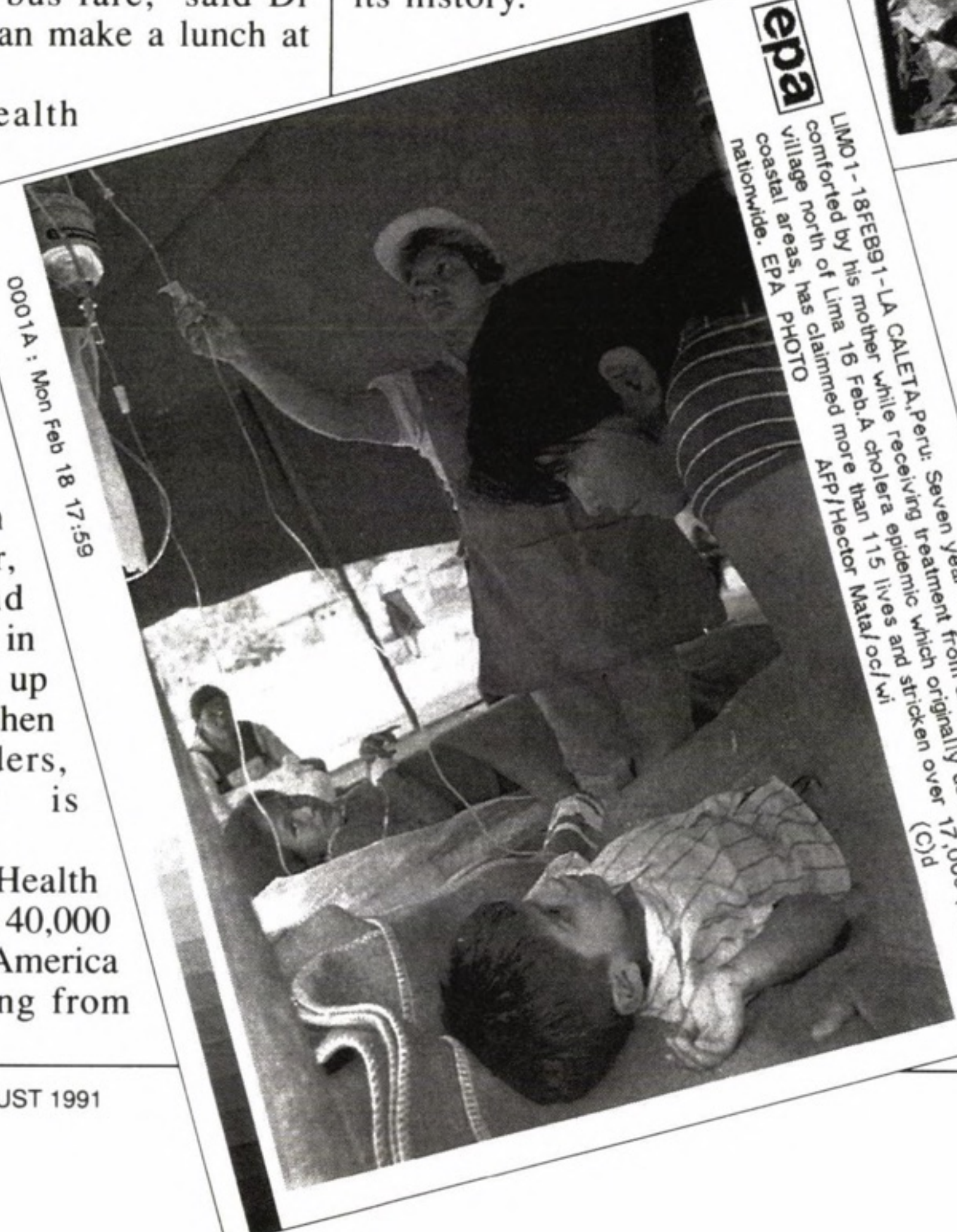


It is only now making headway in its attempt to win fresh foreign loans after five years of clashes following former President Alan Garcia's refusal to pay back the \$20-billion debt. And while aid has been prompt in arriving to combat the immediate cholera danger, there is little sign that the international community has the will to help Peru tackle its water and sanitation problem.

As just one example of how slowly things are likely to move, a \$12-million project to increase the capacity of Lima's water-treatment plant has been on hold for nearly a year despite having been declared a 'priority project'.

In other words, Peru's poor are likely to be fighting off cholera for a long time to come. □

**Suzanne Timmons hails from Tulsa, Oklahoma but lives and writes in Lima.**



0001A : Mon Feb 18 17:59

**epa**

LIM01-18FEB91-LA CALETA, Peru: Seven year old Roberto Pobles, a victim of cholera, is comforted by his mother while receiving treatment from a nurse at a field hospital in Peru's coastal area. EPA PHOTO  
AFP/Hector Mata/oc/wi

nationalide: EPA PHOTO

(C)d



# Simply... The causes of famine in Africa

The rains fail and so the food runs out – surely this is what causes Africans to starve to death, plain and simple. Right? Wrong. Drought only kills because it lies at the end of a long tunnel of human neglect which begins deep in the heart of the West.

## POVERTY



Nobody starves to death if they have money – journalists and aid workers visiting famine zones do not starve; nor do merchants or government employees in towns nearby. But this is true of countries too – the desert states of the Gulf are more infertile than any African country but nobody starves there because they are awash with cash. The bitter background to every famine in Africa is the poverty of the country suffering it – and the Western societies that are so unprepared to share their opulence.

Developing countries do not have the resources to be able to insure themselves against famine. The goods they sell on the world market fetch ever less on the world market – in 1989 the average world market price of the primary commodities on which poor countries depend was just 70 per cent of what it was in 1980 and just 43 per cent of what it was in 1973.<sup>1</sup>



Imagine your own salary being less than half what it was two decades ago. Then imagine yourself having to repay with it the interest on a debt you incurred a decade ago. And then consider whether you too might find yourself in a 'food-deficit situation'.

<sup>1</sup> International Monetary Fund figures, August 1990.

## CONFLICT

All of the countries prone to famine at present have suffered internal chaos from civil war – Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Mozambique, Angola and Malawi. And more than 50 per cent of Oxfam UK's overseas aid worldwide, for example, now goes to conflict-related areas.

Conflict makes people more prone to famine because:

- It disrupts their traditional ways of coping with food scarcity, which might range from gathering wild plants to migrating in search of work.



- It destroys market centres and transport links, which are prime military targets.
- It stops people cultivating their land – for years, any field work in Eritrea and Tigray has had to take place at night, while in Angola the UNITA rebels have indiscriminately scattered land mines across the countryside.
- It turns ordinary people into refugees: in Mozambique there are over four million internally displaced people with a further 1.2 million living as refugees in neighbouring countries.
- It brings about long-term economic decline, as the infrastructure is destroyed and foreign investment collapses.

## NO FREE PRESS

Public opinion has a big and underestimated part to play in Africa as well as in the West. The number of African countries with a free press can, unfortunately, be counted on the fingers of one hand. We mutter about the real freedom of a Western press owned by billionaire entrepreneurs but we are still fortunate compared with the African citizens who have to make do with endless grey propaganda about the achievements of the government or the movements of The Leader. The climate of public opinion in India is one reason why mass famine is a thing of the past there – Indian political leaders would never get away with having allowed a famine to happen.

African countries have less resources than India to play with – and a less developed middle class. But if the behaviour of President Mengistu of Ethiopia had been monitored by a free press, would he have been able to spend more than half the annual budget on the military?





## ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Africa's soil is in general made up of sand and laterite, which erodes more easily and holds less water than the clayey and humus-rich soils of temperate regions. It has a high iron and aluminium content which makes it turn hard on exposure to sun and air – and when devegetated it bakes into a concrete texture which is impossible to cultivate and absorbs no rain.

But all of these factors are worsened by overfarming, overgrazing and deforestation, which often have political causes. When the best land is taken for export crops, peasant farmers growing food for local consumption are forced to work less fertile land too hard. One billion tonnes of topsoil are lost from the Ethiopian highlands each year, according to UN estimates. While across the Sahel belt the Sahara desert is said to be moving southwards at a rate of about five kilometres a year.

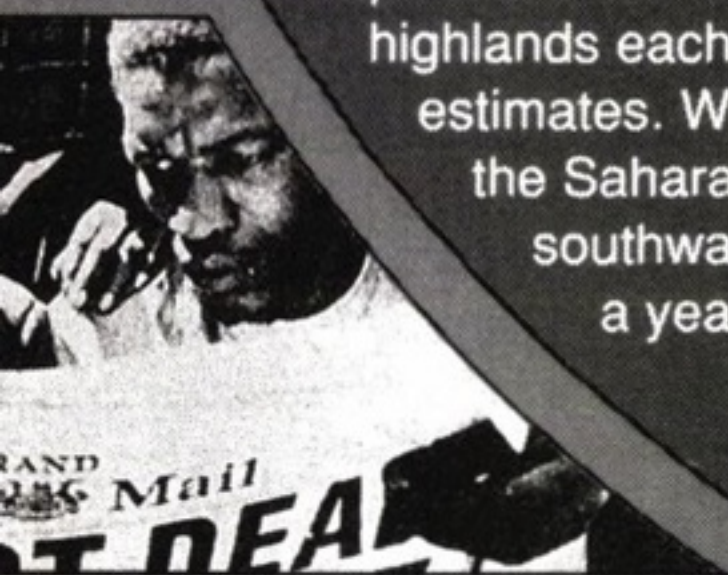
## NO SAFETY NET

If the African poor have been failed in all these other respects there is still the opportunity to prevent famine at the last moment by having an adequate food-security system in place when drought comes. This means adequate buffer stocks of food, together with a code of action that can be implemented when the danger signs start appearing.

It is almost always crop failure two years running which causes famine on the scale of Ethiopia and Sudan at present, so there is usually enough warning. It is just that the warning signs are habitually and callously ignored, both by local administrators and by Western governments.

## DROUGHT

Drought is the kiss of death at the end of this sad story. It tips people over the brink into starvation – but they are only balanced on that brink because of all the neglect that has gone before.





# Thunderbirds are no-go!

**High-tech search-and-rescue teams are ready to fly out of Western countries as soon as disaster strikes on the other side of the world. But would they do better to stay at home? Nick Cater investigates.**

**G**UNG-HO search-and-rescue teams that fly in from all over the world in the hope of saving lives in earthquakes, floods and other disasters are facing tighter international controls now being negotiated by the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO). This follows increasing criticism of their high-tech approach from aid agencies working in the disaster-prone countries of the developing world.

At the same time, the future of international search-and-rescue operations have become entwined with the efforts of military establishments to find a post-Cold War role and avoid cutting their budgets.

Search and rescue is not new. The starting point for many international teams was Mexico City's devastating earthquake in 1975. Since then teams have been established in at least a dozen countries, including the US, UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Japan, Austria and Switzerland. For the Armenian earthquake in 1988, no fewer than 21 separate groups arrived.

The theory behind international search and rescue is that a team of highly trained professionals, often from national disaster units with fire, ambulance or military backgrounds, can fly into an emergency zone and immediately put their expertise and specialist equipment – from sensitive listening gear to sniffer dogs – to work to find people and bring them out alive.

The reality can be rather different. Some teams arrive too late to do much good, without the equipment or skills appropriate to that particular disaster. Few lives are saved, despite the expensive and complicated equipment shipped in. That seems not to deter international TV teams from brushing aside hard-working local people and indigenous aid organizations to record any complaints by the visitors at not being given enough assistance.

Apart from arrogance and ignorance, critics cite three reasons for suggesting that international search-and-rescue teams are of very limited use: the time they take to arrive; their lack of skills and local knowledge; and the resources they divert from locally managed disaster operations, including training programmes to prepare people against the worst.

Rapid-onset disasters such as

earthquakes, cyclones and volcanoes give rescuers very little time to save lives. The limited research so far suggests that 50 per cent of people buried in earthquakes die within six hours, while 95 per cent are dead within 48 hours. Without their own jet transport and good co-ordination at either end of an intercontinental journey, search-and-rescue teams inevitably take at least 24 hours from being alerted in a Northern nation to arrival on site in the South.

Armenia's 1988 earthquake was probably the first disaster studied on the spot by an academic team as it unfolded. According to Dr Fred Krimgold of Virginia State University, this US Earthquake Reconnaissance Group found that of the estimated 15,000 people buried in rubble, 95 per cent were pulled out by the local community and Soviet teams rescued most of the rest. The 21 teams which flew in up to six days after the earthquake brought 1,427 staff and an enormous range of equipment. Despite dogs, heat-seeking cameras and powerful audio

equipment, the international teams dug out only 64 of the 15,000 people saved.

'The experience of Armenia and other recent disasters,' said the US academics, 'has shown that the "golden time" period, during which trauma-induced medical needs can be met, is often limited to only a few hours. This is an impossibly short period for any international disaster medical team to make a significant impact.'

## Robocop cowboy expats

Krimgold still feels there is a useful role for such teams and urges better standards, especially improved training. He is critical of the 'Robocop mentality' of some groups: 'I'd like to see a shift away from cowboy efforts by expats. We need a greater role for the local community with donors in support, not centre stage. Much of the problem is the media, with TV cameras beaming images back home by satellite; the need for political support and fundraising means there is tremendous pressure on some groups to achieve high visibility in disasters.'

Ian Davis, of Oxford Polytechnic's Centre for Disaster Management, insists that an international team only has a real function if it can be on site within three hours: 'These people often have a cavalier spirit and are flabbergasted when the Government doesn't provide them with an interpreter, say, or transport. Some of these groups are a terrific drain on resources just when local people need them most.'

A good knowledge of the local languages, culture, resources and organizations, building techniques and materials, geography, health system and politics can all be crucial in effective emergency management, especially if the operations are to set the stage for a successful long-term relief and rehabilitation programme. Even a well-funded UN-backed search-and-rescue service would be hard pressed to have the correct mix of skills, experience and information instantly on tap.

Until recently, disaster medicine specialists were rarely seen as members of search-and-rescue teams. Yet the medical needs of victims often go far beyond standard first aid. Three medical conditions are most common: spinal damage requiring supports and neck braces; 'crush syndrome', which releases toxins into the blood and needs immediate plasma drips to avoid later kidney or heart failure; and dust inhalation leading to pneumonitis.

Disaster medical expert Eric Noji, of John Hopkins University in the US, spells it out: 'It is not enough to know where to find potential survivors. Search-and-rescue personnel must know what



**Too late for life: 13-year-old Omayra Sanchez, a victim of the Colombian volcano that erupted in 1985, is pulled from rubble after three days but dies immediately afterwards.**



to do once these persons are located. They must have some knowledge of what specific injuries to expect as well as how to estimate relative injury severity and prognosis.'

Knowledge of building types and quality of construction is also vital because these are often crucial factors in deciding how many trapped people will live or die in earthquakes. Low-rise shanty town homes, for example, may collapse easily but they kill far fewer people – providing enough manpower is available to dig victims out immediately. Multi-storey precast concrete buildings will mean more deaths if they collapse but will also create 'voids' where survivors remain trapped. The need for the sophisticated location equipment of international search-and-rescue teams can vary unpredictably from city to city and even within urban areas.

International search-and-rescue teams are a very costly way to save a very small number of lives. Such teams can also consume scarce resources within disaster countries, while their presence can distract international attention and thus resources from the far more important efforts by local people and their organizations. While Southern governments are often reluctant to turn away any help, the resources they bring – sniffer dogs, heat-imaging cameras – would be of little use to local people even if they were left behind afterwards, and there is no possibility of a team offering training in the middle of an emergency.

Dr Peter Walker, of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, says international teams simply do not deliver. The real priority is to work with local people: 'Our concern goes beyond rescue to the long-term well-being of the vulnerable, including rehabilitation and preparedness before the next crisis arrives. The media concentration on here-today, gone-tomorrow foreigners detracts from the heroism and effectiveness of local people who must rebuild their lives – they don't catch the next plane home.'

Another aid official adds: 'The (1990) Iranian earthquake was a very good example of the media ignoring the fact that 90 per cent of the work in a disaster is done by local people before any search-and-rescue team turns up. In any disaster our TV screens present images that suggest the solutions are nothing to do with indigenous organizations but really depend on a team from Buckinghamshire or wherever.'

### Puppet inspiration

The English town of Marlow in Buckinghamshire is base for one of the few independent groups in this field, a charity called International Rescue Corps. In a bizarre twist, International Rescue's life president is puppeteer Gerry Anderson, creator of the namesake emergency organization in the internationally popular children's TV show *Thunderbirds*.

The 'Commander' of International Rescue is Terry Price, an insurance bro-



**F.A.B... Virgil, Brains and Scott plan their next International Rescue back in the 1960s. Little did they know they would be the inspiration for a rescue outfit in the 1990s.**

ker, who runs the group from his home and is astonished if any doubt is expressed about the effectiveness of his team of several dozen unpaid volunteers, including a firefighter, a computer programmer and a roofing contractor. He denies that International Rescue is ineffective or can hamper local rescuers, adding: 'We have a far wider role than simply search and rescue, including assessment, co-ordination and communication. We are doing our best to cut our response time and we work closely with local rescue teams, passing on expertise on the spot.'

Price repeatedly refuses to say whether, during a decade or more of dashing to disasters, International Rescue has ever dug an earthquake victim out alive – 'I'm not interested in body counts, that's not what it's about'. Even he affirms that well-organized local people are the solution: 'I hope we do ourselves out of a job.'

Price says he does not have money to spare to attend the many meetings inspired by the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and intended to improve the theory, practice and professionalism of search and rescue. From Austria to the UK via Finland, the Philippines and the US, the meetings have produced recommendations on everything from satellite communications to visa requirements, including on-site disaster co-ordination centres and the incorporation of medical skills into every team.

Overall, UNDRO hopes to see international legal agreements on search and rescue but the speed with which these might be approved by governments and actually put into operation is expected to be slow. Senior UNDRO official Fabrizio Gentiloni said that the agency was, however, close to completing the first global search-and-rescue directory listing details of the experience and capabilities of up to 30 organizations committed to international disaster operations.

Gentiloni added that UNDRO hopes to

strengthen links between search-and-rescue teams and local governments and emergency organizations in disaster-prone countries, to improve co-operation and communications on the ground amid chaotic conditions, and 'we hope, see the end of the well-meaning amateurs as government-backed professionals take over'.

### Call for Stormin' Norman

Governments are certainly taking an interest in international search and rescue, and the entire issue has been given new impetus in recent months by factors unconnected with the UN Disasters Decade: the departure of the Cold War and the arrival of the Gulf War.

In the debate about a post-Cold War role for Western forces, some military specialists have been quick to warn that hopes of a 'peace dividend' from reduced expenditure may be in vain because the war with Iraq means new rapid-deployment units will be needed. Others are suggesting that military units should be maintained but take on international search-and-rescue capabilities.

At the same time, criticisms of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including UNDRO and the UN High Commission for Refugees, for their supposed failure to act over the Kurds within Iraq, have led the British Prime Minister, John Major, to press for the creation of a new disaster organization which would absorb existing UN relief agencies.

Unlike UNDRO this would have its own operational capabilities and, following the precedent of Kurdistan, be able to work across national borders where necessary. Major is reported to feel that the new agency would need a strong commander – along the lines of General 'Stormin' Norman' Schwarzkopf. □

**Nick Cater works for the International Broadcasting Trust in London.**



AID

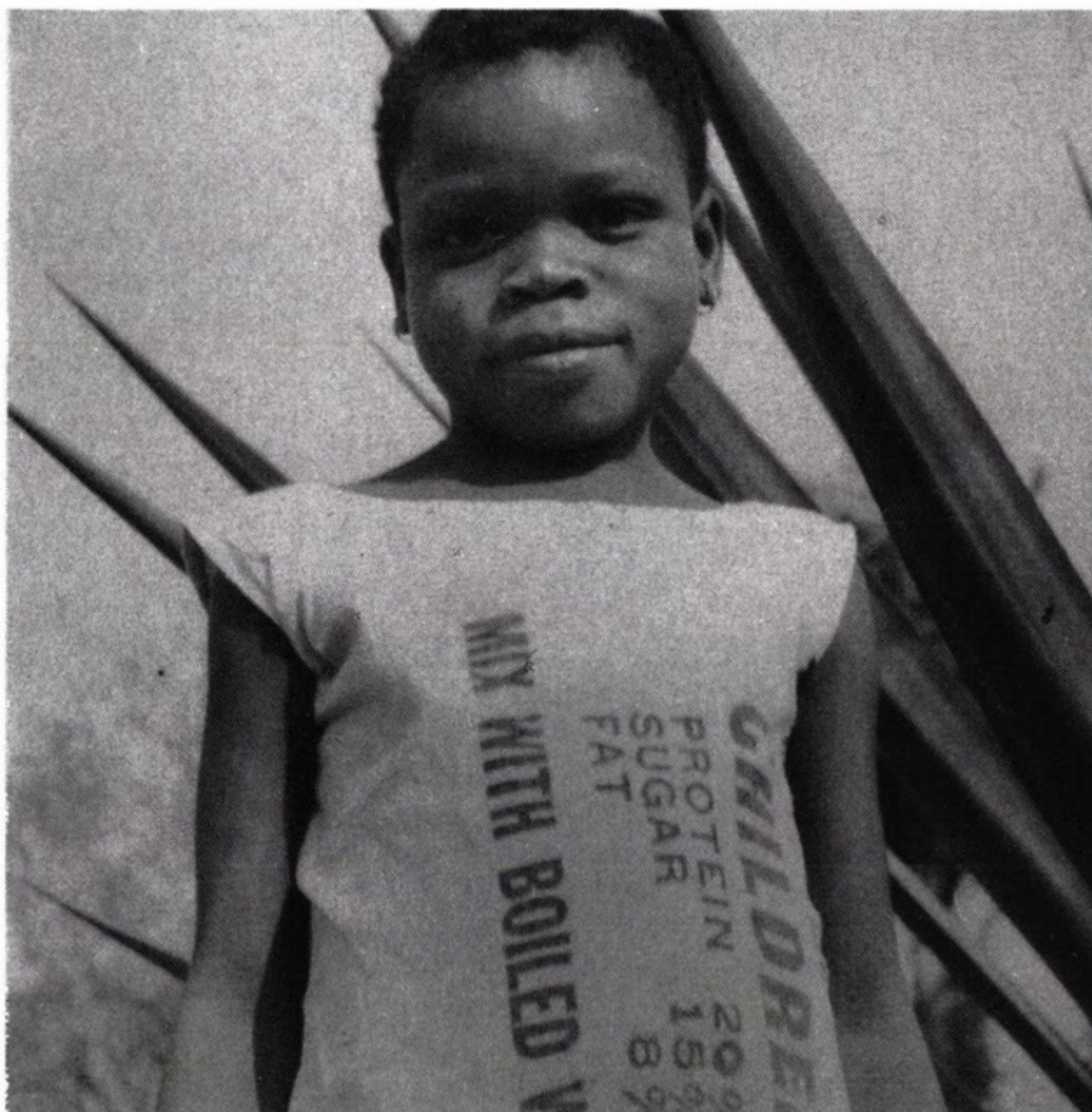
# Low priority

Human concerns well down the agenda

**M**OST foreign aid is not going where it should, according to a recent United Nations report.<sup>1</sup> Countries giving aid provide on average only 0.3 per cent of their Gross National Product for foreign assistance – less than half the 0.7 per cent target agreed to by the international community.

Of this amount, less than a quarter goes to social sector spending and no more than one third of that to human priority concerns in the fields of basic education, primary health care, rural water supply, family planning and other urgent human needs. On average about one twelfth of aid goes to human priority areas.

The way aid money is spent can make an enormous difference to the countries receiving it. For many countries, especially in Africa, aid makes up such a high



**Clothed in false hopes: too little aid reaches human needs.**

proportion of development budgets that aid priorities inevitably become development priorities. In Burundi, Chad and Uganda, aid provides about one-half of

the total spending on health and education.

If aid money is not earmarked directly for human development, it is not likely to

find its way there on its own. Finance ministers of aid-receiving countries are 'reluctant in the best of times to undertake social expenditures, which offer little immediate financial return and which demand recurring expenditures long into the future', according to Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, a former finance minister of Pakistan, and now Special Advisor to the United Nations Development Programme.

It is hardly encouraging to such officials if donors are also unwilling to finance recurring social spending (like education and health care and prefer to give money for 'capital-intensive schemes that just happen to require machinery and technical assistance from the same donor countries', Dr. Haq adds. This raises questions about who really benefits from aid. All too often it is the donor countries rather than the recipients that benefit; and all too often it is short-term considerations that win out.

Dinyar Godrej

1. Human Development Report 1991, UNDP.

REFUGEES

# Stranded

Myanmar flight to Thailand

**S**Ein Aye and his family walked across the Thai border. They were fleeing the persecution of the Myanmar (Burmese) army during its latest offensive, aimed at weakening the ethnic minorities opposed to the Rangoon regime.

Aye's brother was conscripted as an unpaid porter. Fearing a similar fate, which would have left his family without a breadwinner, Aye left his village to seek the safety of the Mon control area near Sangklaburi, West Thailand. The Myanmar army had taken their rice without payment. With the rains due to start in May, it was a 'do or die' situation as the roads quickly became unpassable.

The situation at the new border camps is equally insecure. The local Mon army battalion has provided some rice stores, but hardly enough to feed 1,500 people for the next five months until regular supplies can get through again. Lack of money, internal political squabbling and corruption have only worsened the situation.

Every day parties of hunters

go into the surrounding jungle looking for food. Monkey stew is now the main supplement to a fish and rice diet. Timid baby monkeys are kept as pets and fetch up to \$32 when sold. But it will not be long before the monkeys move deeper into the jungle, away from danger. They have already done so near the longer-term camps.

There are five such camps near Sangklaburi, with a total population of around 7,000. They have schools and hospitals, but supplies are still a problem, especially when the rains come. The Mon Liberation Army is in nominal control of the area, but the Thai border police can influence the situation dramatically. At the end of February 1991, after the murder of two Thais, the road to the camps was closed for a week, cutting off vital supplies.

At the new, inaccessible border camps people are left to fend for themselves and go hungry. A hospital has been built but it was only at the beginning of March that two Mon nurses arrived. In spite of foreign aid, and the presence of international medical personnel at the main camps, there is a shortage of supplies and doctors.

Malaria and dengue fever are two of the main killers. Bronchial and respiratory diseases – the logging roads throw

up great quantities of choking red dust – as well as diarrhoea, hospitalize many children. A whooping cough epidemic is sweeping the region and there are no vaccines available.

There is much rhetoric on the side of the anti-government groups about overthrowing the Myanmar junta. The truth for Mon refugees is that they are going to have to survive on their own for the foreseeable future.

The 250,000 strong Myanmar army has new weaponry, assault planes and helicopters from China.

The minorities are only shakily united and reliant on foreign aid. Many more refugees will die before a solution is found. By then the monkeys will have moved deeper into the jungle.

Rob Stewart



**The first visit: this doctor ran out of medicines after four hours.**



TOURISM

# Sherpa trek

Women carry the burden in Nepal

**Y**OUNGER Sherpa men, of all Nepalis, are the most 'hip'. They dress in expensive jeans, tracksuits, baseball caps. They have Walkmans, tend to speak good English and smoke designer cigarettes. The women, however, have on the whole kept up the traditional – and hard – way of life in the mountains.

The influx of Western influence, which followed expeditions to Everest from within Nepal's borders, has greatly affected the Sherpas' way of life. Schools, hospitals and clinics, postal services, air transport and radio communication changed a semi-nomadic life to one much more dependent on tourism, trekking and expeditions.

But the 'glamorous' work of the high altitude porters is all done by men. The Sherpinis, the Sherpa women, are left to do the work at home. And the Khumbu, or Everest region, is not an easy land to live in – especially when most of the men are away for up to 10 months of the year working



No hot showers for sherpinis: supporting tourism increases conflict and deforestation in Nepal.

for trekking and expedition groups.

The planting and harvesting seasons coincide with the trekking seasons. Women also run tea-houses, sometimes feeding dozens of trekkers a day. They look after children and animals, fetch food, water and (with increasing difficulty because of deforestation) firewood.

Living without men is not an entirely new experience for

them. Before the Chinese closed the Tibetan border in 1959 many men were away for long periods on trading journeys. But never before have so many gone away, nor for such long periods – and never have so many failed to return. Between 1971 and 1988 some 57 hired Sherpas were killed on expeditions.

The benefits of tourism to Nepal are debatable. There's more hard cash, but deforestation

has increased with the need for cooking fuel and the clamour of thousands of tourists for hot showers. Western values and tastes translate only with difficulty into Nepalese society; tourists too are going to have to change their habits when they visit different societies.

Joan Klatchko

Photo : Joan Klatchko

POPULATION

# Motivating men

Sizing up the problem

**D**ELEGATES from 28 African countries recently attended a media seminar on Population in Harare, Zimbabwe, organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to mark the publication of this year's State of World Population Report.

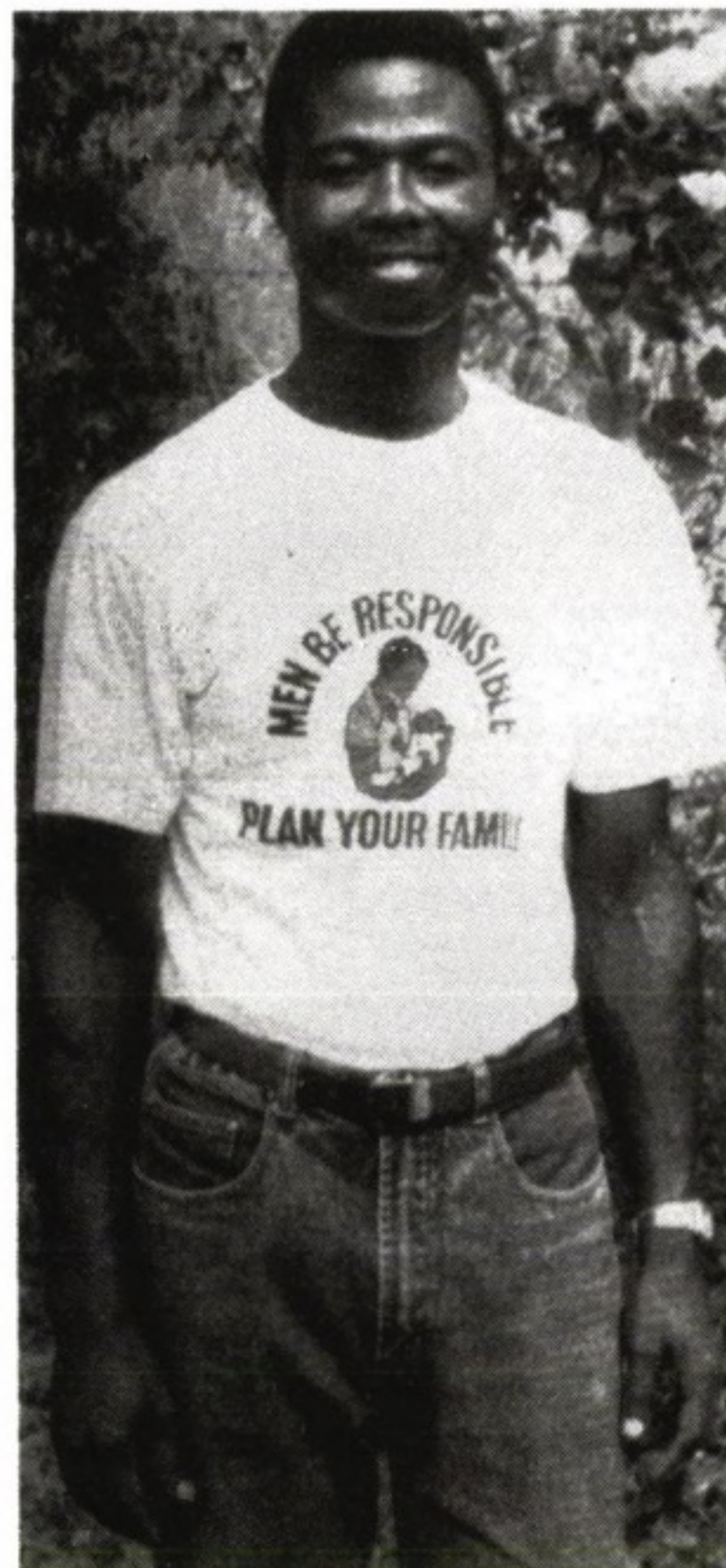
Senior journalists and broadcasters from across the continent debated topics ranging from the content of the Report to the wider issues of press freedom and use of local languages. A major theme, voiced first by Yamai Jack from the Gambia, was the need to involve men more in family planning. 'Men make these decisions, not women,' she told the mostly male gathering.

Zimbabwe is certainly trying to tackle the problem of male involvement head-on. After a rousing talk from Florence Chikara, the country's chief of information and education at the National Family Planning

Council, seminar delegates were taken to a village outside Harare to see Ms Chikara and her 'male motivation' team in action.

Village men were introduced: chief, local and district Party officials. Then the motivating began with vibrant, witty, slightly risqué pep-talks from a local woman health worker and her male counterpart. Dismissing the idea that using condoms in any way resembled the sensation of wearing rubber galoshes he reassured the men that sex was all in their heads anyway. And bringing the question into the open of whether any condoms could possibly be big enough for such large male egos, the health worker produced a fulsome wooden penis and carefully demonstrated how to encase it in a sensitolubricated condom (donated by the people of the United States of America).

Titters and laughter were followed by questions. The delegate from Swaziland wanted to know why only old men were present in the audience. It was explained that women could not attend for 'obvious' reasons, and that younger men had their own sessions. Neither group could be with these senior village men for



Ghana: setting a bold example.

such a matter.

The field trip provided plenty to talk about for the seminar group. They produced resolutions calling for their governments and UN agencies to provide them with accurate information

on demographic and related issues. The subjects are sensitive in many countries. Some regimes do not want to admit their high infant mortality rate. Other administrations want to maintain their high fertility rates and suggest perhaps with some justification that it is not up to Western organizations to tell them how many children to have.

Zimbabwe's attitude is realistic. Annual population increase is currently at 2.8 per cent, outstripping the 2.7 per cent average economic growth rate of the last ten years. Providing contraception is part of an integrated approach to try and match Zimbabwe's resources to the needs of all its people. Family planning is on the main agenda along with education, health care and industrialization and can be broadcast and written about freely. 'Not so in my country', confided one delegate ruefully. 'And if the government doesn't like what we write they don't bother to censor it – they just tell us there's no foreign exchange to buy newsprint.'

Troth Wells/UNFPA State of World Population Report 1991

Photo : Jane Turner



## BANGLADESH

## Military wipe-out

Losses sustained by the Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and navy during the 30 April cyclone must set a record for military damage outside of war. The massive tidal bore that surged across the low-lying airport at Chittagong and into the city's river-mouth port and naval base wiped out half the BAF's aircraft and immobilized or sunk all the major ships in the Bangladesh navy.

Some 45 Chinese-built F6 fighters, a version of the Soviet MiG 19, were based at Chittagong. Only five were flown out to Dhaka, despite ample warning from the meteorologists. The other 40 spent about 12 hours under salt-water and ended up in a pile on the tarmac.

Four newly delivered Soviet helicopters, bought for hard currency, were also destroyed. Two had been assembled, while the other two were still in crates.

The navy lost two submarine chasers, two hydrofoil torpedo boats, two landing craft and a small auxiliary. All the remainder of the Bangladesh fleet of 55 at Chittagong were badly damaged. Often this was from large merchant ships which broke their moorings and smashed into them.

*From Far Eastern Economic review, Vol. 151 No 22, 1991*

## PEACE

## Climb on, McBride

During the Gulf war, American B52 bombers stationed at RAF Fairford in the UK made regular sorties to bomb the Iraqis. And a peace activist, Juliet McBride, also made regular sorties to the base to protest about this. Four times she climbed into the base. The first time she was escorted out nicely; the second time she was thrown out nastily; the third time she was arrested and held for an hour; and the fourth time she was arrested under the 1911 Official Secrets Act, held for eight hours and charged

with 'entering a prohibited place with a purpose prejudicial to the security of the state'.

This was a rare charge against such protests and carried a possible sentence of ten years. The authorities were not sure of Ms McBride's purpose – her only action was to unfurl a banner 50 yards from the bombers with the slogan 'Not in my name'. She explained: 'All I wanted to say was: "Your fence, your guns, your uniforms, your pretend duties do not stop me saying no".'

Anyway, the Department of Public Prosecution has had to climb down and drop the charge. So Ms McBride can continue to climb in.

*From New Statesman & Society, Vol. 4 No. 152*

## AUSTRALIA

## A town like Alice

Alcohol is taking a firm grip of many of Australia's aborigines. Liquor consumption in Alice Springs, a centre for the aboriginal people, is 2.5 times higher than the national average. Widespread unemployment and a breakdown in tribal values are to blame, it is suggested.

With the rise in alcohol abuse has come an increase in violent crime. Alice Springs now has 44 homicides per 100,000 people per year, compared with the Australian average of two per 100,000. Last year 12,770 drunks were taken into protective custody in Alice. This in terms of numbers, is more than half the town's population.

*From The Australian, reported in World Press Review, Vol. 38 No.6 1991.*

## PHARMACEUTICALS

## Drug bribes

Drug companies spent \$165 million in 1988 on gifts, dinners and vacations to entice doctors to prescribe their products, it was revealed at a Senate meeting in Washington recently. Details included more than 180,000 doctors being paid \$100 each to attend dinners and 80 per cent ending up prescribing the drug that was being promoted there. Naturally the extra costs of such promotions were passed on as higher drug prices to the patient.

*From Health Action International News, No. 57, 1991.*

## RAINFORESTS

## The burger connection

After so many denials by burger makers of the connection between hamburgers and the destruction of the Brazilian rainforest to make way for cattle farming, now comes a different story. Birds Eye Walls' Chairman, Alan Price, admitted that his company imports 30,000 tonnes of beef from Brazil each year for their burgers and other meat products.

This surprising confession was to the National Farmers Union annual general meeting, and was used to berate the farmers for failing to produce enough high quality beef that his company needed.

But then the quality from Brazil might not be so good. In March, the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture banned six ranches from selling meat due to their illegal hormone use in their cattle.

*From Agscene No. 103 1991.*

## AFRICA

## Hunger pangs

Hungry Zambians dug through a concrete slab 12 feet underground to reach cans of radioactive beef. The cans had been buried as a safety measure by the authorities in 1990. Czechoslovakia had donated the 2,800 cans, which were found to be polluted with radioactivity generated from the Chernobyl partial meltdown.

After the cans were buried near the town of Chongwe, and covered with a concrete slab, local people used pickaxes to dig them up. Police are now mounting guard to stop the cans being taken and the contaminated food eaten.

*From San Francisco Chronicle, Feb. 10, 1991*

## "endquote"

**'Comparison and conformity go together; they breed nothing but suppression, conflict and endless pain.'**

*The Impossible Question, by Krishnamurti*

**'You loot, I shoot.'**

*Bumper sticker in English, El Salvador*

## HONG KONG

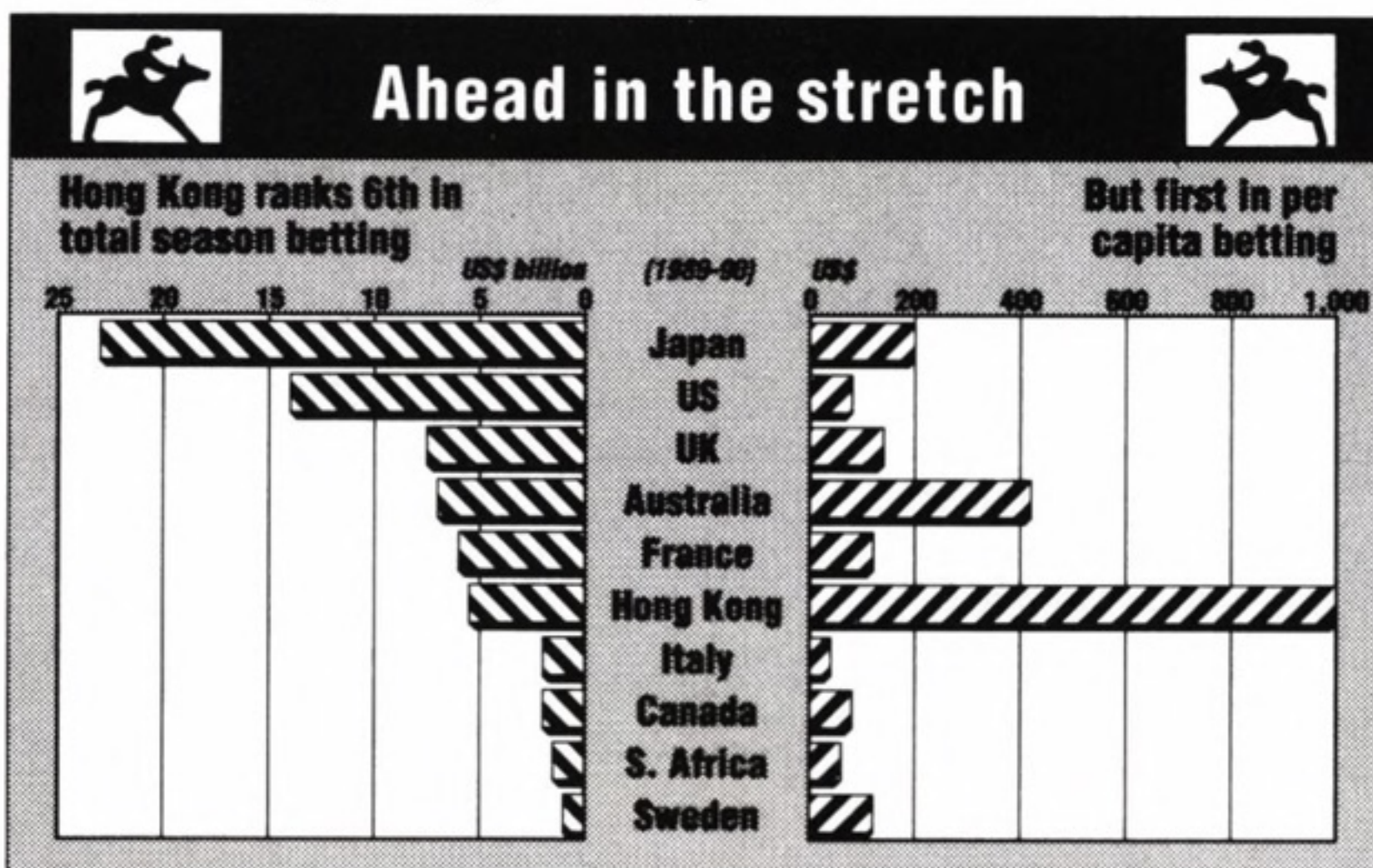
## Greed, charity and taxation

The Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club (RHKJC) is a strange public utility. It takes vast sums from Chinese punters, the world's most avid gamblers as the chart below makes clear, and recycles much of the profits into social welfare projects and government revenue.

This convergence of greed, charity and taxation will probably remain when China takes control of Hong Kong in 1997 – despite Beijing's well-known abhorrence of gambling.

Hong Kong's horse racing is booming. Turnover for the 1990-1991 season is expected to reach a record six billion dollars. The tax and charity money that has come from the totalizer has become a mainstay of the Hong Kong Government's finances. Last year the RHKJC contributed 9 per cent of the taxes collected, about \$626 million, or the same as is spent on social welfare. An additional \$118 million was given direct to charities of its own choice, roughly ten times more than that of the next biggest donor in the colony.

*From Far Eastern Economic Review, Vol. 151 No. 23 1991.*





# Mugging the Good Samaritans

Third World charities are under attack in the UK for being 'too political'. There is even a public appeal for money to be used on harassing Oxfam and Christian Aid. NI co-editor, Dexter Tiranti, takes a closer look at the offensive.

**W**HAT'S happening? Bang: *The Daily Telegraph* editorializes against charities 'for whom left-wing sloganising has replaced philanthropy'.

Bang: I hear on morning radio criticism of Oxfam and Christian Aid for misleading their supporters – too much of the charities' energies are going on lobbying.

Bang: The Charity Commissioners' public enquiry into Oxfam ends after a year, rapping the charity over the knuckles for directly addressing the political causes of poverty.

Bang: Questions are asked in the House of Commons: 'I wonder how many of those donating or collecting or giving up free time to serve in Oxfam shops knew that Oxfam was pouring funds into projects run by the Marxist Government of Nicaragua, including the building of a shower block for a prison...?'

The knocking goes on, with scarcely a murmur in reply. For us at the *New Internationalist* this nonsense has to stop. How well-fed representatives of the establishment have the gall to hound agencies who are so patently working for the underprivileged, is beyond us. For every smear and every sneer will reduce the funds of the development agencies. And less funds will mean people will stay illiterate who might have read, will stay blind who might have seen, will remain jobless who might have worked, will remain thirsty who might have drunk clean water ... will remain a disorganised mass, who might have made decent self-respecting lives for themselves.

Let's look at the knockers and their motivations. First, *The Daily Telegraph*. The largest circulation 'serious' daily in the country, yet sometimes difficult to take seriously. Like its most caricatured readers, 'Disgusted from Tunbridge Wells' and choleric retired colonels from Hove, it breathes faded gentility and is partially sighted. While regularly knocking Oxfam as a charity, the newspaper studiously ignores the distortions of the charity laws which favour its own kind. Swept under the carpet are the anomalies which allow public schools like Harrow and Eton to be charities too – thus not having to pay tax on their very considerable incomes.

The radio interview and parliamentary question had a different background. Over the airwaves came the self-confident Ivy League-educated voice of a young American telling us that the International Freedom Foundation, whom he represented, was worried that the British charity laws were being breached. Certainly the legislation is a hotch-potch of archaic statutes based on Elizabethan Acts – and I mean Elizabeth the First. But do I need an American to tell me this? Well possibly. After all it was far Right organizations in the US, geed up with corporate donations, which helped establish the International Freedom Foundation subsidiary in London as well as a spate of right-wing charities like the Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies in London during the 1980s. They flourished in a favourable climate – it was the decade of Thatcherism. And they have had access to the highest offices of power. The International Freedom Foundation even provides briefs for Members of Parliament to read out at Adjournment Debates, like the one above.

Borne along on the flood tide of the New Right, charities like The Adam Smith Institute, The Institute of Economic Affairs and the Social Affairs Unit came into being or gained a new lease of life. They sponsored conferences on how to privatize state enterprises, argued for a poll tax, ways to reduce the taxation of the wealthy and how to dismantle the social-welfare structure – the nanny state. To you, all of this might look highly political but not, apparently, to the media or the Charity Commission which oversees the charity laws.



Spokespeople from such organizations have been deliberately adversarial. They echo some of the more strident government ministers in hounding possible liberal or left-wing sympathizers. Progressive teachers have been favourite targets, then have come 'irresponsible' social workers, the 'loonies' of local government, trade union leaders and now we hear noises about the staff of Third World charities. The attack has been on those professions standing against the prevailing ethos of the 1980s.

Frustration with charities who do take on a lobbying role on behalf of their clients, who engage in such 'political' action, is understandable. Because part of the new philosophy of this last decade has been for government to put greater reliance on the voluntary sector to deliver services previous the responsibility of the State. The rationale is that this is more efficient and that charities understand their clients' real needs better. Indeed government grants to voluntary agencies have doubled in real terms over the decade to £293 million (\$470 million) by 1987/8.

Given this change of emphasis, the last thing the Government wants is for those same agencies to campaign in the corridors of power on their clients' behalf. Well, some clients are acceptable. Animals, perhaps. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals can campaign to change the law and introduce dog licences, to protect the public from American pit-bull terriers. They have done so vigorously and with impunity. Changes to the law? Highly political you might think, but of no concern to those knocking Third World charities.

It is a different matter with Oxfam's campaign on behalf of the Cambodian people. For when they ask for an end to Whitehall's recognition of the Pol Pot-dominated coalition of opposition forces at the UN General Assembly, proper supervision of the UN supplies to the Khmer Rouge-controlled refugee camps on the Thai border and an end to the aid embargo on this small country – then the Charity Commissioners' enquiry censures Oxfam 'for having prosecuted their campaign with too much vigor'. Criticism of Pol Pot – responsible for the deaths of a million Cambodians – should, they say, be conducted with 'balance'.

There is more to come. The International Freedom Foundation, proud standard-bearer of the New Right, is once again warning that it is investigating Christian Aid. No doubt it continues to bridle at the agency's mandate from the former British Council of Churches that the agency should strengthen the arm of the poor until they can stand up to those who so often act against them, until they have the power to determine their own development under God. It may have heard that this agency, together with many other Third World agencies, believe that to remain silent is to be political – since those who are silent are content that the status quo continues. And the status quo does not benefit the wretched of the earth.

Dexter Tiranti

Dexter Tiranti  
for the *New Internationalist* Co-operative





## ★ FILM

### In Bed With Madonna/Truth or Dare

directed by Alex Keshishian

Although a staged finale fulfils the saucy promise of the British title, the US title **Truth or Dare** is closer to the spirit of this film. The basic premise is that here, at last, Madonna dares reveal the truth about herself.

**Truth or Dare** is a backstage documentary, focusing on Madonna and her dance troupe during the 'Blonde Ambition' tour that so outraged the Pope. In theory the camera was allowed access to Madonna at all times, and the film, with its classically grainy black-and-white vérité look, furthers this impression, constantly drawing attention to the filming process. But the truth the film tells is not at Madonna's expense – her own production company oversaw the film, and she appears so much in control of what we see that she is arguably its real director.

This all adds to the mystique of a star whose appeal lies in her degree of control – both of her business dealings and of her image. Her constant metamorphoses constitute a classic strategy for evading capture – for not being pinned down by sexual/social conditioning. This has made Madonna a hotly debated sexual icon: why should a woman whose images duplicate classical Hollywood sex-bomb stereotypes be considered in any way subversive? Can her irony really be considered liberating? Or is hers an extreme form of collusion with misogynistic imagery?

The answer suggested by the film is that Madonna has transcended not only the 'victim' status that fatally haunted Marilyn Monroe, but also sexuality itself. By being a parody at once of the Sexual Woman and of the all-round entertainer, Madonna simply 'quotes' sexuality as the signifier of a greater, more threatening form of control. In her own way, Madonna is infinitely less sexy than, say, the asexual Michael Jackson.

Madonna is not afraid to come out badly in front of the camera – it's her show, after all. Staging a visit to her mother's grave, protesting fatuously to her father about not compromising her 'artistic integrity', humiliating her childhood friend Moira, Madonna knows how bad she looks and evidently doesn't care. The price for Madonna's complete control is



Madonna: a hotly debated sexual icon in grainy black-and-white.

paid not by herself but by others – like the young dancers, whose vulnerability she admits to exploiting in order to play the mother-figure (she claims to have deliberately selected 'emotional cripples').

If, contrary to the popular image of stardom, other people are paying the price for the star's fame, that itself may be Madonna's singular achievement. That revelation makes **Truth or Dare** a fascinating but disturbing film – deeply revealing of the fact that in showbiz, 'truth' and the 'inner self' may be utterly redundant terms.

Politics ☆☆☆  
Entertainment ☆☆☆

## ★ BOOKS

### Big Sugar

by Alec Wilkinson (*Random House US*)

Every year, 10,000 West Indian men arrive in the sugar-cane fields of Florida to do the back-breaking manual labour which is too hard and too low-paid for most Americans. The working conditions of these 'cutters' have improved only a little since the 1940s when those who tried to leave the plantations were arrested, returned and chained to their beds at night.

Alec Wilkinson, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine, describes their lives superbly. The cutters, many of whom spend up to nine months a year living in the company barracks, are unfailingly eloquent: 'We are slaves. They pay us money but really they buy us. We live in captivity, we must obey our master, anything he say we have to do. We are all of us

under a sufferation.'

The cutters are a skilled and necessarily docile labour force. If you complain you will be promptly shipped back home. If you keep quiet and are lucky enough to avoid illness and injury, you can come back year after year though, as Wilkinson says, 'cane cutting in America never seems to buy the cutter a ticket out his circumstances.'

Wilkinson describes plantation life with great vividness and his sensitive observations about the men are gracefully delivered: 'With their eyes staring into the distance they look as if the landscape they see in their minds is not the one through which they are walking.'

A first-rate reporter, Wilkinson also follows some of the cutters back to Jamaica to see the lives they leave behind. Between the terse intensity of Wilkinson's writing and the patois-flavoured poetry of the cutters' own reflections, **Big Sugar** packs a powerful punch.

Politics ☆☆☆  
Entertainment ☆☆☆

### Dragons in Distress

by Walden Bello and Stephanie Rosenfeld (*Food First*)

### Brave New Third World

by Walden Bello (*Earthscan UK, Food First US*)

Walden Bello is a Filipino who, after years of advocacy in the anti-Marcos movement, joined the Institute for Food and Development Policy in San Francisco – long-time friends and collaborators of the *NI*. His main project there has been an in-depth study of Taiwan, South

Korea and Singapore, Asia's supposed miracle economies: after years of being told that the Philippines should be emulating their model of development he wanted to take a close look.

**Dragons in Distress** is the fruit of that work, a detailed and often quite technical analysis of each of the economies in turn which concludes that these celebrated models are actually headed for the rocks. The old strategy of high-speed, export-led growth is no good any more as the economic superpowers continue their move towards protectionist super-blocs. Unable to penetrate these blocs or out-compete Japan with hi-tech products like cars and camcorders, they desperately need a new, sustainable strategy.

Bello's suggestion is that they should start producing explicitly for the Third World – lower-gloss, lower-cost computers; eco-friendly low-cost transport systems; and electro-mechanical inputs specifically designed to aid labour-intensive organic farming.

This is all part of the strategy he advocates for all developing countries in **Brave New Third World**, a very short and punchily presented look at the state of the world. Much of the book is an authoritative overview of the economic plight of the Third World after a disastrous decade in which it suffered a 'freefall in living standards' and an 'erosion of economic sovereignty'. But unlike most observers he goes one stage further to suggest a way out of the downward spiral.

Faced with economic



superblocs like the EC and North America, he says, the Third World has no alternative but to form its own regional trading blocs. This is the old idea of South-South trade in much more worked-up and feasible guise. It still takes a leap of imagination to see it coming about but at least there are the bare bones here of an alternative model to the current Washington/World Bank economic orthodoxy. And by basing his 'strategy for survival in the



global economy' on genuine democracy, Bello has covered those bones by stealing his opponents' clothes.

Politics ☆☆☆☆  
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

## MUSIC

### Parakou

by Angélique Kidjo (Mango)

It would be easy to generalize about the male-dominated nature of the African music world, but it's hard to avoid that impression when you look at the African artists who have made their mark internationally. The image of the male artist as grand master dominating the proceedings is hard to escape, for example when Mory Kante lords it benevolently over his band, female dancers and all (not least because he tends to use his instrument, the kora, as a phallic symbol on a par with the rock guitar). A more extreme example is polygamist

extraordinary Fela Kuti, with a row of women kneeling though-out his live sets in homage.

But women have always exerted a powerful presence on the African music scene. There are the legendary police women of the Amazones de Guinée, and the belters of Zairean *soukous* like Mbilia Bel, whose showbiz flair makes her a close relative to the grandes dames of salsa.

Recently singers like Oumou Sangare, Ami Koita and Sanougue Kouyate have made their mark in the classical *griot* tradition. But you couldn't find a stronger contrast to the traditional matronly demeanour of *griot* than in Benin's Angélique Kidjo, whose out-and-out techno chic is very much out on a limb.

For years record companies talked of launching an African star of Bob Marley proportions onto the Western market (Thomas Mapfumo and King Sunny Ade were notable abortive attempts). Should they ever decide to look for Africa's Grace Jones or Sinead O'Connor, Kidjo would be a prime candidate.

Kidjo's is not a soaring voice in the great African tradition, coming across as slightly tense and monotone. But it's the effortless way she rides the backings,



Angélique: Africa's Grace Jones?

holding the focus with strong rock-based inflections, that makes her presence so compelling. Her work is a hybrid, as the West African flavour of the

melodies and lyrics – she uses five languages, notably Benin and Yoruba – is matched to the funk feel of the music, written by her and recorded largely with European musicians.

Parakou is not as complex as some recent African techno experiments but at a time when many of Africa's grand masters have gone badly astray in courting the Western mainstream – Mory Kante turning into Phil Collins, Salif Keita getting engulfed in labyrinthine jazz fusion – it's a welcome direct stroke. With records this powerful to her name, that front cover of the style magazines could yet be Kidjo's – always assuming she wants it.

Politics ☆☆☆☆  
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

## ★ STAR RATING

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Excellent | ☆☆☆☆☆ |
| Very good | ☆☆☆☆  |
| Good      | ☆☆☆   |
| Fair      | ☆☆    |
| Poor      | ☆     |

Reviews editor: Chris Brazier

## CLASSIC

# Moving Heaven and Earth

... being the book that tries to pull it all together

I tried to review this awe-inspiring book a few weeks ago but found I couldn't. At the time I thought this was because I had nothing critical to say, and I've since found one slight snag to focus on. But today I've begun by doing the 10-minute meditation the author recommends before starting work, so we'll see what happens.

Lucy Goodison is an archaeologist turned massage therapist, a socialist and feminist: not a follower of fashion, but one who holds the different strands together and weaves new meanings from them. The book was 20 years in the writing and as I move through it, I feel my own experience and reflections in those years have been assimilated and articulated, fittingly, at the opening of this last decade of our century.

From a detailed study of the symbolism portrayed on seals and statues in early Cretan burial sites (her doctoral research), Goodison builds up a powerful picture of pre-patriarchal beliefs and ritual. All is centred on death and regeneration, bodies are buried in foetal position, facing towards the cervix-like opening of round tombs which in turn look towards the sun setting over the sea. The sun is experienced as life-giving womb, for it also rises from the sea. Women dance to the sun, and the female pubic triangle, subtly ubiquitous, forms the base of everything.

Next Goodison shows how the advent of the patriarchal, hierarchical and warrior-like Mycenaean culture from the Greek mainland – pastoralists turned palace-builders – affected the religious symbolism of sun-worshipping, egalitarian Crete (a process which led eventually to the familiar pantheon of squabbling Greek gods). Weapons begin to appear on seals, and males are depicted in violent conflict whereas before they had danced in fertility rites, played games beneath trees or were sexually embraced by a larger, female figure. Mastery becomes an issue – the issue. The sun turns from all-giving womb to all-seeing eye and a new God is born – detached, judgmental and supervisory.

This section is sprinkled with illuminating quotes from Western archaeologists and historians (all men, some contemporary) who have conspicuously failed to notice these changes in symbolism and their implications, and have even twisted the evidence to suit their preferred

notion of heroic Western forebears: apparently sun worship is considered OK for Africa and the East but not for the Greeks.

In 'The Separation of Heaven and Earth', Goodison lets us see how the writings of Hesiod and Homer chronicle the denigration of the feminine and the elevation of the masculine as the new dualism was established to accord with the new world order: spirit over matter, 'pure' over 'impure'. This first half of the book makes sad reading, for the violence done to an originally integrated society and symbolism has been inflicted on all of us in Western culture. Our own individual psyches have been torn in two to fit the dualistic world view of patriarchy.

But Goodison does not leave us in despair. As she herself abandoned academia for the creative chaos of radical politics and the Red Therapy group she co-founded, so she embarks from the secure shores of historical analysis onto the wide, healing waters of dream symbolism and meditation, the Hindu chakras, and so on – in order to show how we can choose and change the symbols through which we understand and channel life. The second half of the book is dense with enjoyable exercises to help us re-experience and work with the unity of mind and body which our Western inculturation has denied and suppressed.

As thinker and therapist, Lucy Goodison is both respectful and unafraid. She dismisses nothing as mere 'superstition' – the Tarot and acupuncture, the Astral and the auras, are all treated as valid symbolic systems to express the integrity of life. This is Jungian territory but she does not overlook, out of deference, Jung's patriarchal blind spots; and she tackles modern astrology's tendency to accept traditional masculine/feminine role definitions.

Reliably sound and enlightening, her lucid good sense will reassure those who suspect holistic therapy of self-absorption and political irresponsibility. The only snag for me is that I find the Marxist premise that people make culture and therefore people can change it, a frustratingly superficial account of causality or whatever we call it – karma, will, destiny. In a mysterious sense, we do choose what to make of life but I feel that life has at least as big a hand in the making of us.

Having said that, I believe the recommended meditation enabled me to write this today. Though finding the criticism gave me the lever to work with, asking for energy and inspiration brought life to the task. Perhaps the resolution of my dilemma demonstrates in a small way the proper relationship between analysis and creativity, fatalism and voluntarism – as Goodison's magnificent book does in a much greater way.

Yvonne Burgess

**Moving Heaven and Earth – Sexuality, Spirituality and Social Change** by Lucy Goodison (The Women's Press UK, 1990).



# Western Samoa

Photo: Richard Harrington/Camera Press



**Leader** Head of State Malietoa Tanumafili II  
**Economy** GNP per capita \$640 (US \$19,840)  
 Monetary unit: Tala

The economy is based on primary industry, and on imports obtained through remittances. In 1988 exports totalled \$17 million, chiefly from cocoa, copra, bananas, timber and taro – while imports came to \$90 million. Light industries provide local substitutes for some imports. But the balance-of-payments deficit and heavy aid reliance mean the International Monetary Fund (IMF) hovers nearby with a plan to cut the national debt.

**People** 167,000

**Health** Infant mortality (1985-90) 50 per 1,000 live births (US 10 per 1,000)

**Culture** Polynesian. The Samoans see their islands as the centre of Polynesia's still powerful, hierarchical culture. The *fa'a Samoa*, or Samoan Way, remains vivid, even among those hundreds of thousands of Samoans now dispersed overseas; the *aiga*, or extended family, remains the critical unit.

**Religion:** Christian, mainly the Congregational Church of Samoa, and the Catholic and Methodist Churches.

**Languages:** Samoan and English

**Sources:** *The State of the World's Children 1991* and information supplied by author.

**Never previously profiled**

**W**ESTERN Samoa enjoys a relaxed Polynesian lifestyle – albeit not exactly the 'free love' nirvana portrayed by anthropologist Margaret Mead – which conceals its earlier fate as a victim of colonial chaos, extravagant even by exotic South Pacific standards.

Predominantly Protestant missions were established in the last century, before traders arrived. Then the arrival of traders, chiefly British, German and American, in stern competition coincided with a recurrence of traditional tribal conflicts.

The traders persuaded their respective consuls to side with different high chiefs, and in 1889 seven warships from three navies lay anchored in the harbour of the capital, Apia. Six were sunk or damaged in a cyclone, epitomising the apparently providential nature of the cause of a free Samoa.

Finally, though, Germany annexed the west, the USA the east (still a US territory), and Britain sailed away – leaving the writer R. L. Stevenson, who had migrated there for his health and is buried on a hill

overlooking Apia bay. New Zealand took Western Samoa at the outbreak of World War One.

Samoan nationalism was most strongly manifested in the *Mau* movement in the 1920s, finally violently suppressed. The country became independent in January 1962, since when it has been ruled by its *matai* (chiefs) who alone could vote. About 10 per cent of the population are *matais*. Of these, less than half are women. A referendum in 1990 gave universal suffrage to those over 21.

An agricultural economy with a low-key, laid-back tourism industry, Western Samoa depends on remittances from expatriate Samoans and aid for 70 per cent of its foreign reserves – which stand at a healthy 10 months' cover of imports.

It is through the export of its people, often the most talented and best educated, that the country has survived its 2.3 per cent per year birth rate. Many live in New Zealand, Australia and on the Pacific coast of North America.

The wily Prime Minister Tofilau Eti was one of the first foreign leaders to visit China after the Tiananmen Square shootings of 1989, and was rewarded as he had anticipated by a US\$12 million grant for a new government building.

Elections earlier this year to choose a new Legislative Assembly (*Fono*) did not involve any ideological gloss on the traditional, personal power struggles. But they reflected the changing priorities of the new broader, younger (and more evenly female) electorate.

Samoa's shift towards greater democracy marks an important contrast with the move back to more tribally based, hierarchical structures in nearby Fiji, fuelling Samoa's long-held feelings of cultural superiority to its neighbour.

Rowan Callick

## At a glance

\*\*\*\*\* Excellent  
 \*\*\*\* Good  
 \*\*\* Fair  
 \*\* Poor  
 \* Appalling

### INCOME DISTRIBUTION

\*\*\*

The *matais* rule the clans and pull the purse strings.

### SELF-RELIANCE

\*

Overwhelmingly dependent on remittances and aid.

### POSITION OF WOMEN

\*\*\*

Improving thanks to equal educational opportunities.

### POLITICS



Moving slowly towards open democracy.

### LITERACY

\*\*\*\*

Almost universal literacy.

### FREEDOM

\*\*\*

Jailing of an editor in 1990 damaged a reasonable record.

### LIFE EXPECTANCY

\*\*\*

60 (men), 65 (women) (US 76 years). Western illnesses such as heart disease increasing.



# coming next

# MONTH

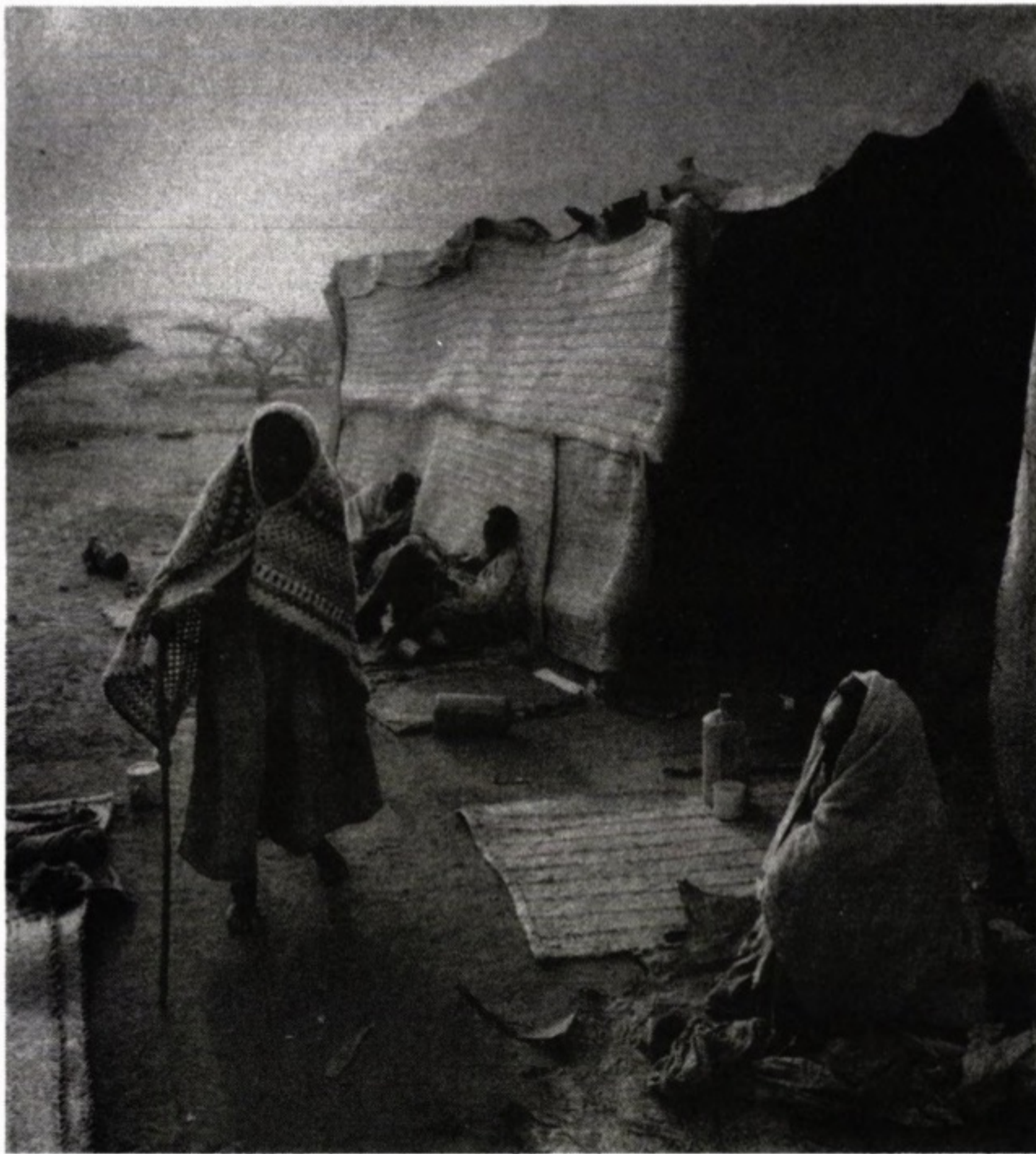


Photo: S. Salgado/Magnum

## The dispossessed

*More and more of the world's people are forced to leave their homes to survive, while the international community offers them nothing but a cold shoulder. Western governments look set to slam the door on all asylum seekers. Voluntary agencies are failing to meet the new need. And growing numbers of unfortunates made homeless within their own countries have no-one to rely on – except themselves. This special issue of the NI includes:*

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- **Refugee in orbit** - personal testimony
- **Fortress Europe** - Running up the drawbridge
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Order from: *Lynda Medwell*, Dept NI, Birchwood Hall, Storridge, Malvern, Worcs WR13 5EZ, England.

Dear Bill,  
Having a great time here in the West Country. Weather not too hot so have been exploring Bristol Colston Street years ago. There's a Greenleaf Bookshop (a women's co-operative), lots of cafés and bars. But the most interesting is *Bianchara/Joliba* - two shops on 3-floors, both selling beautiful crafts, textiles, jewellery etc, with fair-trading from Mali and Niger. *Bianchara* (also a co-operative) sells lovely wedding blankets. *Joliba* (also a co-operative) sells some form of positive development sources where some of the world's 'fair-trading' is taking place as well as 'fair-trading' And Bill, their world music stocks are out of those NI T-shirts. Right on or what?!  
Just wait till you see what I've picked up. See you next week.  
Love Jo



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3NN8



# NEW

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### Indicators

Population  
17,000,000 (1980)  
17,500,000 (1985)  
18,000,000 (1990)  
18,500,000 (1995)  
19,000,000 (2000)  
19,500,000 (2005)  
20,000,000 (2010)  
20,500,000 (2015)  
21,000,000 (2020)

### Public Expenditures

1980: 1.2%  
1985: 1.5%  
1990: 1.8%  
1995: 2.1%  
2000: 2.4%  
2005: 2.7%  
2010: 3.0%  
2015: 3.3%  
2020: 3.6%

### Labor Market

1980: 1.2%  
1985: 1.5%  
1990: 1.8%  
1995: 2.1%  
2000: 2.4%  
2005: 2.7%  
2010: 3.0%  
2015: 3.3%  
2020: 3.6%

## Third World Guide 91/92

### The World as seen by the Third World



While indigenous and traditional food production practices use about half a calorie of food, the fossil fuel-based mechanized and chemical agriculture uses 10 calories of polluting, non-renewable energy to produce that same calorie of food.

### Facts, Figures, Opinions



Perhaps one of the most interesting examples of an authentically American Third World project in the 19th century was the Paraguayan government of Carlos Antonio López in the mid-1800s. As early as 1820, (and this is unique in Latin America) literacy was extinct in Paraguay, a country where the Guaraní language today, continues to use the Guaraní and sugar Trade in wood, tobacco, yerba mate and sugar was state-run. Crops had been diversified and livestock was raised on government ranches. The public railway was expanding. This project, though authoritarian, was egalitarian and

Bombay is India's wealthiest city, a hub of manufacturing, printing, banking and trade, as well as headquarters for the country's western live in slums, with 350,000 sleeping on the streets. In 1985, one-fourth, or about 680 million, of Asia's 2.8 billion people were living in urban communities. By the year 2000, the urban population in the region is expected to reach 1.4 billion; 60 percent (or six out of 10) will be squatters and shum-dwellers.

## Botswana

Population: 1,285,000  
Area: 581,730 sq.km  
Capital: Gaborone

### A testimonial from the North:

'The Third World Guide provides detailed information on all countries and a committed Latin American perspective on virtually every Third World issue. As a reference book it is indispensable for all concerned with North-South relations.'

**Willy Brandt.**  
(former Chancellor, West Germany)

### And one from the South:

'It contains the naked portrait of reality.'

**Eduardo Galeano.**  
(author, Open Veins of Latin America)

### What the Third World Guide adds up to

More than 612 pages of global information with 285 maps, 700 diagrams, over 10,000 references and a healthy 17-page easy-to-use index cross-referenced on theme and country, giving you instant access to a wealth of facts.

### Is the Third World Guide biased?

Yes. Most reference books deny that there is any subjectivity in their material. But of course all contributors and publishers have political views. The Third World Guide does not patronize readers with a pretence of neutrality. It is openly and intentionally biased:

- In favour of the poor
- In favour of women
- In favour of freedom
- In favour of tribals
- In favour of nature
- Against militarism
- Against authoritarianism
- Against hamburgers, disposable chopsticks and throwaway consumerism.

### Who produces the Third World Guide

This is the sixth edition of this work, first published in Portuguese with more recent editions in English. It is based in Montevideo, Uruguay and draws on more than 75 key thinkers and writers.

The English editions of the Third World Guide are published with the help of Novib, a Dutch non-governmental organisation. They are not strangers to us. For the last ten years the New Internationalist has collaborated with Novib on the joint production of the Third World Calendar. We share a commitment to work with and give a voice to the struggles and aspirations of the dispossessed, through the dissemination of the highest-quality publications.

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